pub-lic work.

MASTERS THESIS OF NICK ADAM

This is public work.

This is pub- lic work.

This thesis is not an easy read.

Perhaps no one's thesis is easy.
The task of thesis was not easy.

This thesis comes during a sabbatical
from a 15-year career as a Chicago
designer. This sabbatical began after
making 'partner' at a most celebrated
studio that I helped lead and grow.
I've come to realize the easy path
is simply not interesting to me.

MASTERS THESIS OF NICK ADAM

This is public work.
This statement might just be
a little too big. To acknowledge
the too-bigness I've designed
the title to set just a little too big
for the measure of this book.
While 'This is' and 'work.' snuggly,
and rightly so, justifies, 'public'
is just a little too big. The word
breaks to the next line, creating
an interesting composition and
a moment of contemplation within
what would have been a quick read.

Dedicated to the mountain climber that inspired me, then married me — my partner, Lyndon Quiring Valicenti.

The heart in the upper left was drawn by Hermann Zapf.

In 1999 Lyndon's brother Sonny totaled her car. Rather than replacing the car, Lyndon decided 'no more cars.' She took the insurance money and headed to Mount Kilimanjaro hiking the peaks for two months with several Sherpas, and so goats they had brought with. As the weeks past, so did the goats. 19,000 feet above sea-level is an interesting elevation for a vegetarian. This is all to say the journey changes you. This thesis is more of a journey across peaks than a walk in the park.

CON TEXT

A PHOTO ESSAY

are we going? Where

This thesis is a response to three big questions of mine. The big type above presents the first question. These questions are conceptually and physically set in *life*. You will come across the other two questions in this book when you see the above type style.

Life, is a typeface designed by Wilhelm Bilz & Francesco Simoncini in 1964 for German type foundry Ludwig & Mayer.

In the 1960s, artist Jean-Michel Folon drove from Rome to Brescia, noting each of the arrows he saw. During the 7-hour trip, he amassed over a thousand arrows.[1] We can understand his decades' worth of arrow-based work by connecting his doing to his seeing. The following eight spreads contain photos taken during a five-minute walk on Weybossett Street — from RISD's CIT building to the Fleet Library. This photo essay functions as a preface, it creates common ground, connecting the thesis with what we all see.

1.   Nelson, George. *How to See: Visual Adventures in a World God Never Made*, 1977
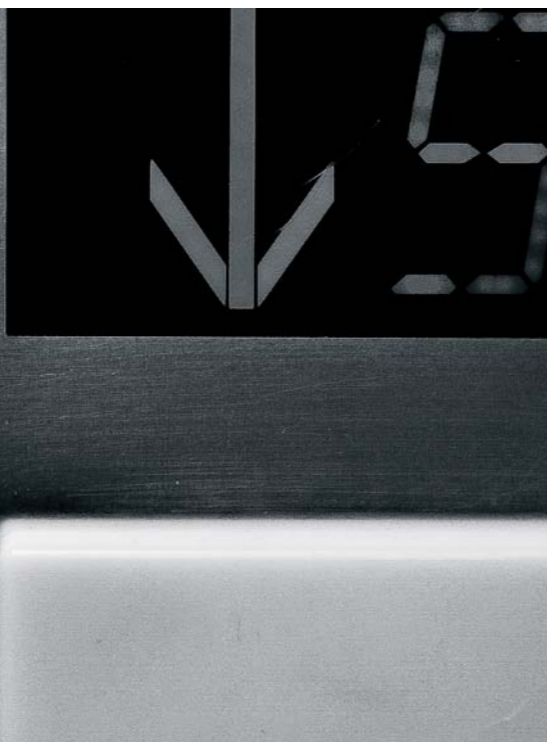
06:30:07PM   #01–02
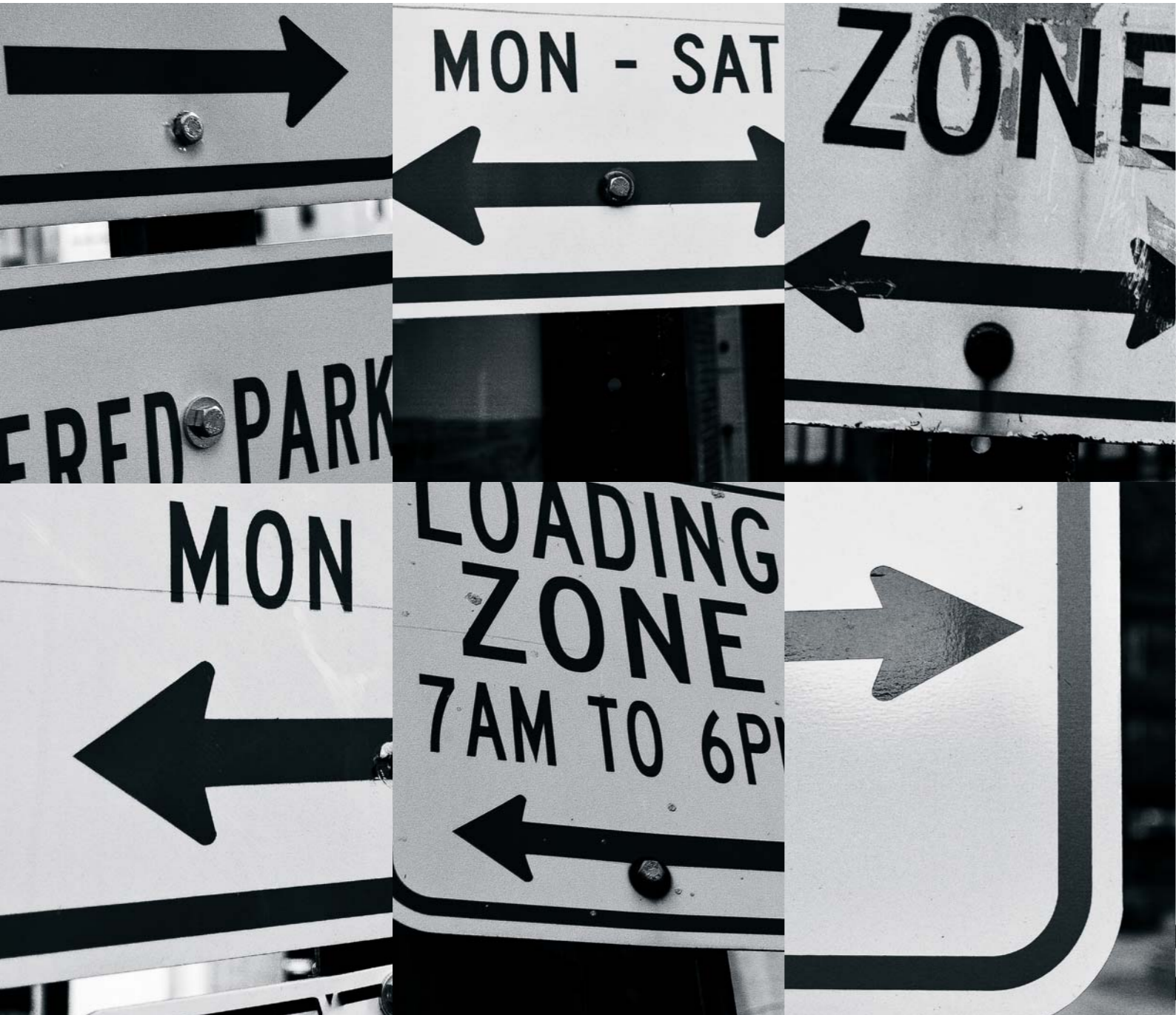
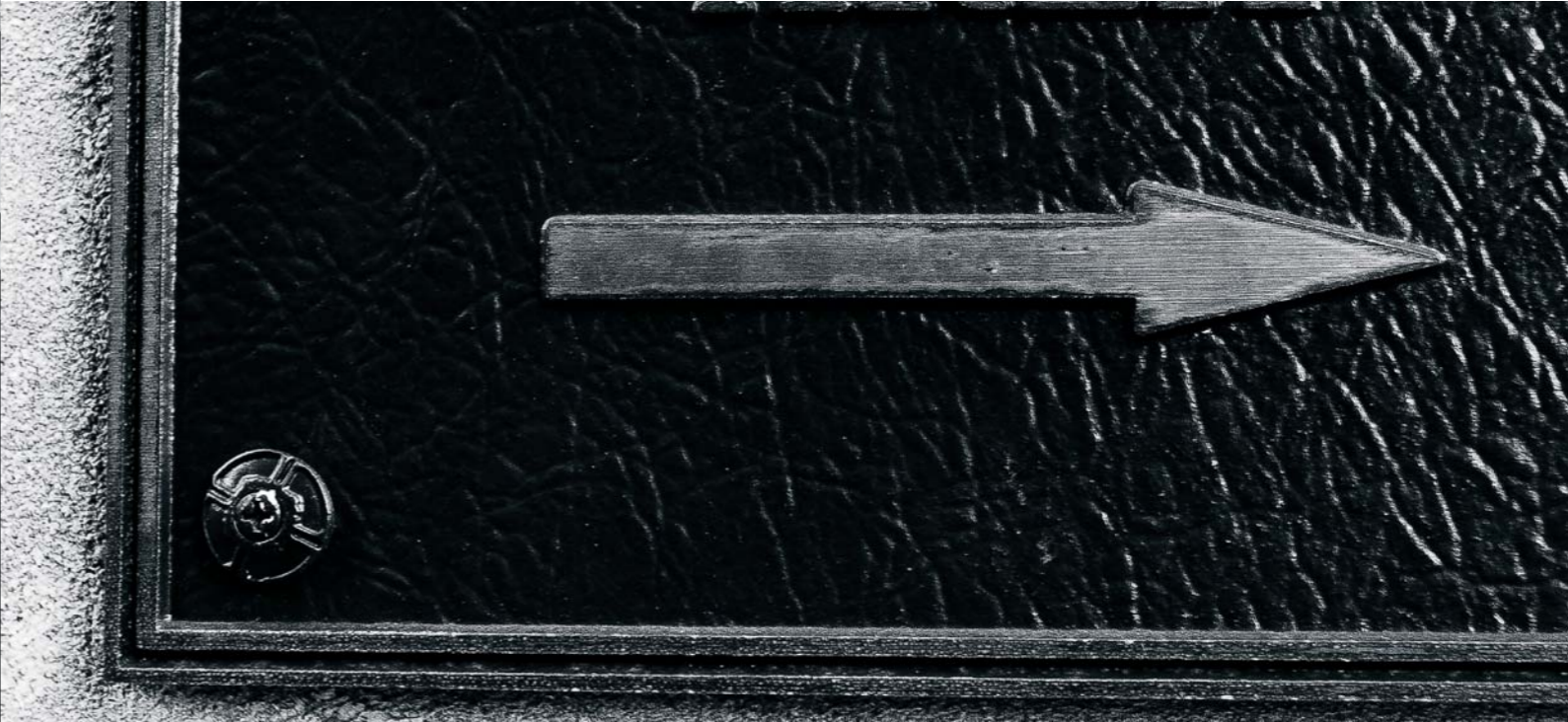06:30:15PM   #03–06
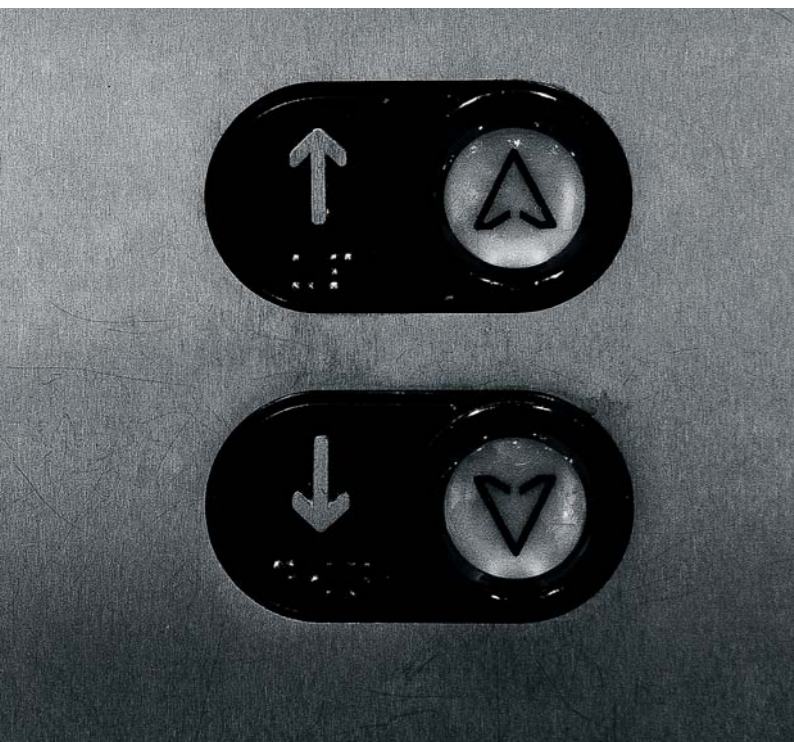
06:30:22PM   #07

06:30:30PM   #08–09

06:30:37PM   #10–13

CONTEXT   WHERE ARE WE GOING?

CONTEXT   WHERE ARE WE GOING?
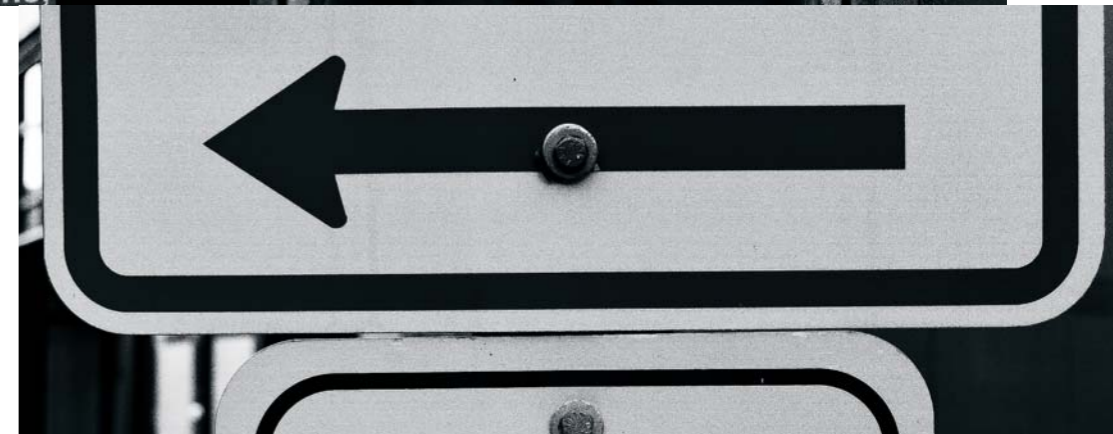
06:31:45PM   #23

06:31:52PM   #24

06:32:00PM   #25

06:32:07PM   #26

06:32:15PM   #27

06:32:22PM   #28

06:32:30PM   #29

06:32:37PM   #30
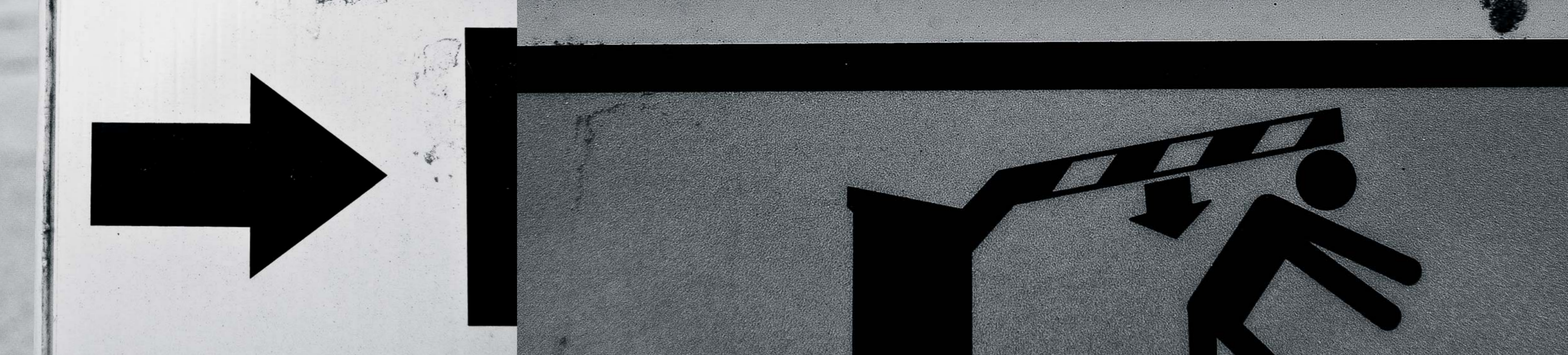
06:32:52PM   #32

06:32:46PM   #31
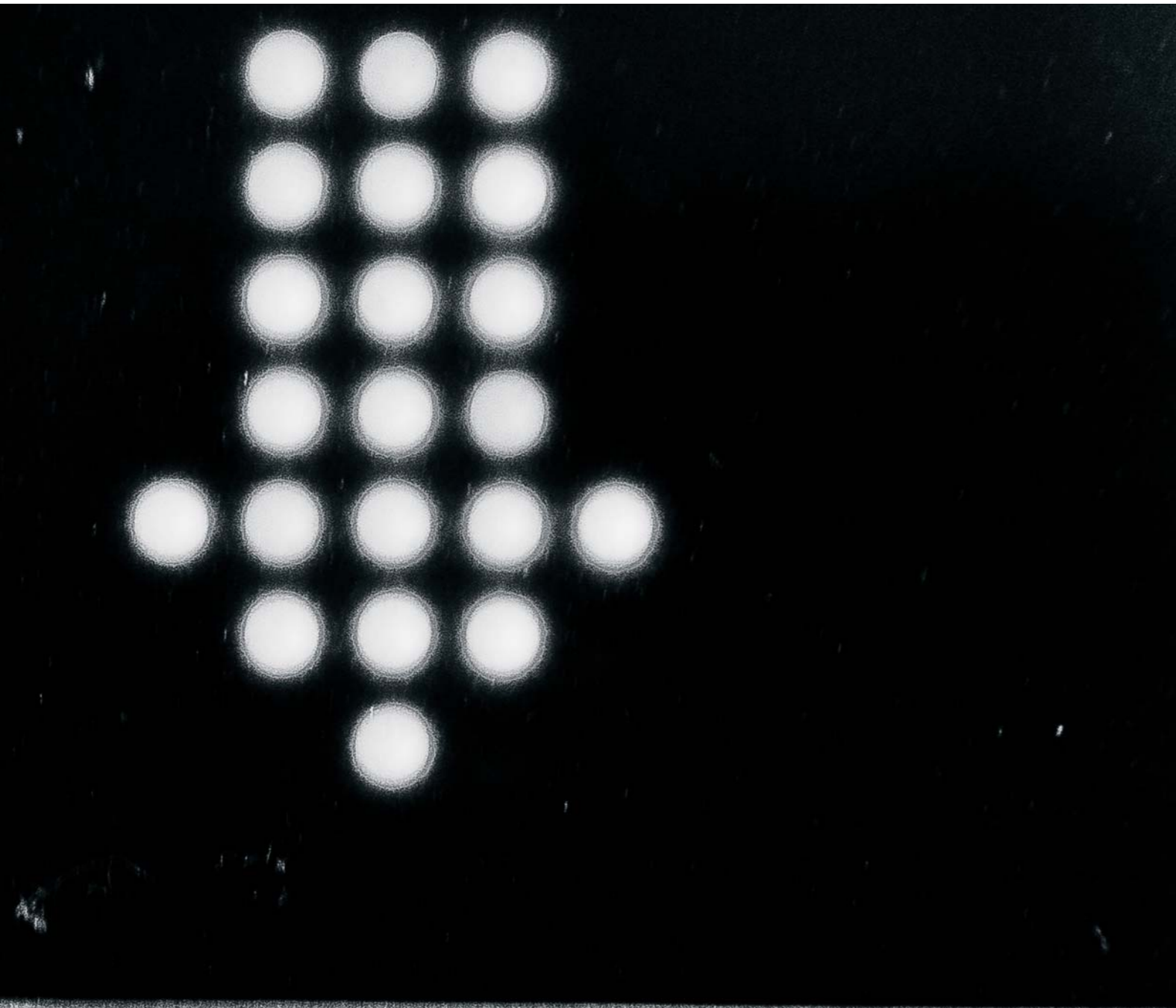
CONTEXT   WHERE ARE WE GOING?

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

ONE WAY
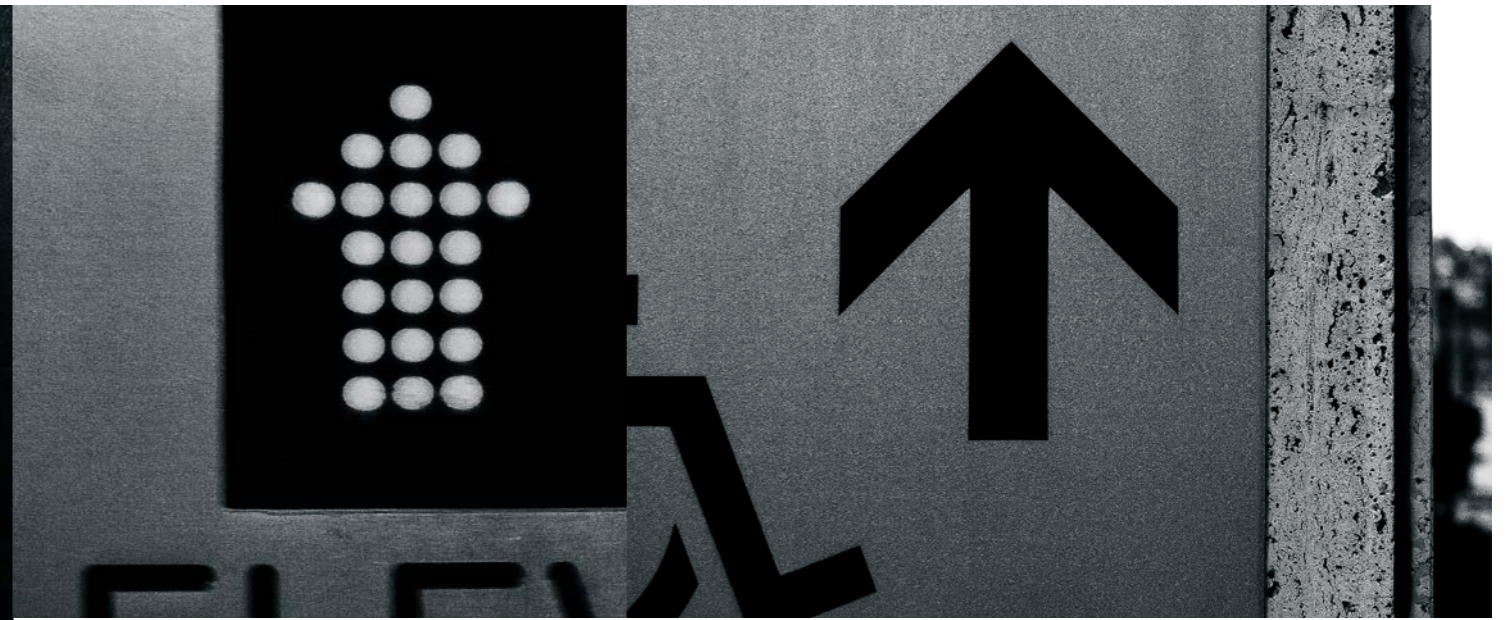
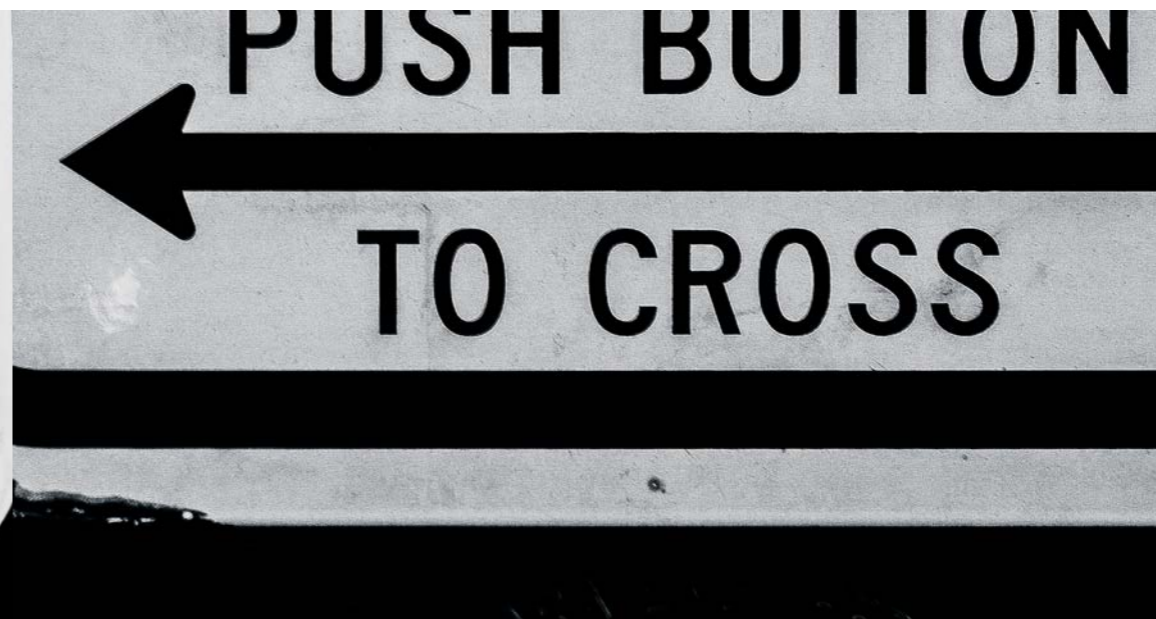06:34:07PM #42 — 43

06:34:15PM #44 — 45

06:34:22PM #46

06:34:30PM #47

06:34:45PM   #51 — 52

06:34:37PM   #50

06:34:52PM   #55

06:34:45PM   #53 — 54

Abstract

This thesis positions graphic design as an integral form of public works.

This is public work regards the causal relationship between graphic design and its publics as an opportunity to explore the formal maneuvers to enhance an artifact's visual codes. The idea is an experiential one: rich and meaningful form can lead to rich and meaningful experiences. The designed artifacts of our world function across informational (effect) and emotional (affect) modes. The complexity of these operations take on an infrastructural role — what we see day-to-day shapes our experiences and understanding. The opportunity of a designer to practice in a manner responsible to their publics is to see the task beyond yielding a service. By creating artifacts that participate in culture, designers have the ability to affect public life.

My practice is an effort to formally unite the ideas of affect and effect into a singular expression: *æffect* — the way a thing feels is how it works. My thesis focuses on the nuances of letterforms and graphic form. This was an intentional effort to sharpen my craft and attention to detail as a way to engage meaningful *æffect* uniting concept, form, and message.

To care for the details is to care for the public. The smallest thing builds the larger thing.

MASTERS THESIS OF NICK ADAM

public works, *n*   first used, 1587
:   deeds done for the public good
Oxford English Dictionary Online.

:   public works are a broad category
of infrastructure projects
Wikipedia. "Public Works," last edited
on 1 November 2017

:   public works, like wall paintings
and billboards, have a greater
challenge to be economical and
sign-like. They need to be read
and engaged as people quickly
speed by on a highway or on a busy
New Orleans street, and they
must be accessible & democratic
without compromising the work.
Kay Rosen, *A Constructed Conver-
sation, Journal,* #3 Vol. 1 No. 1, 2010
London Reprinted in *Social Medium:
Artists Writings, 2000 – 2015*

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

MASTER OF FINE ARTS · 2018

DEPARTMENT OF GRAPHIC DESIGN

This is public work.

CONTENT

Publicness

Graphic design is a practice that yields the surfaces by which we understand the world by. Graphic forms influence our lives, intentionally and accidentally, in the meaning that we read into the artifacts we see. As we move about our day, we are guided by the designed surfaces that we come into contact with.[1] In this respect, the work of a designer is public work.

1. Every properly functioning human being transforms the visual signals that [they] receives from outside into structured, meaningful entities. [Their] capacity to structure [their] environment according to [their] needs–that is, [their] ability to work out a rapport with [their] world–determines the quality of [their] life.
—György Kepes, *Education of Vision*, 1965

2. The first project in this thesis is a set of ephemeral cards they can be found on page 64

3. The final project shown in this book is on monuments, it begins on page 288

4. I often speak of the authority of design. When I do so, I speaking in the 13th century sense.

authority, *n* first used, 1225 : a book, passage, etc. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*.

5. Even the planet itself has been completely encrusted by design as a geological layer. There is no longer an outside to the world of design. Design has become the world. Design is what makes the human. It is the basis of social life, from the very first artifacts to the exponential expansion of human capability. But design also engineers inequalities and new forms of neglect.
—Beatriz Colomina
Istanbul Biennial curatorial statement, 2016

DESIGN AS PUBLIC WORK

As a graphic designer, I consider my role in a social context —as a collaborative creator of artifacts across a multitude of public realms and public audiences. Graphic artifacts—from ephemeral cards[2] to permanent monuments[3]—become fixtures within the spaces we occupy, building the visual infrastructure of our world. These designed surfaces are read and experienced day-to-day by numerous audiences. These designed surfaces are read and experienced day-to-day, as individual are prompted to reaction by the symbols, words, styles, and compositions they encounter.

AUTHORITY AND OPPORTUNITY

The artifacts of design project an authority[4] that operates on two levels: each artifact speaks on the level of the work and subject it represents; collectively they speak as a whole—the public sphere. I see every project, from the ordinary to the extra-ordinary, as an opportunity to respond beyond the service and the scope that initiated the project.

IMPACT OF SCALE

I am interested in the way detail and craft scale and function with respect to public space. Every design maneuver is an opportunity to designate meaning that ultimately will function on a much larger scale. Intentional craft and keen attention to detail become methods of engagement, transforming the potential of a given work, and providing for the engagement of a more public audience. Each design decision—from the smallest detail to the grandest gestures—are opportunities to advance the passerby's experience of public space.

POSITIONING A PRACTICE

These designed artifacts, in aggregate, construct the surfaces by which we read, understand, and negotiate the world.[5] Through analysis and systematic construction of visual language, *This is public work.*, explores graphic form and marking as a critical practice of public engagement. The forms and symbols that frame every activity are human-made: this suggests reality is constructed by the work we produce. My practice considers the responsibility and opportunity a graphic designer can have in the use and advancement of visual language. Attention to detail and craft are significant in the ways they convey meaning and intention within a work, and across the larger graphic environment.

What are we seeing?

saying?

MAYBE · THIS·IS·ENOUGH

The work speaks for itself—does it?
Or, is it more that the work projects visual codes
into the world, and the various publics
that come in contact with them read the image
and then speak on its behalf?
The smiley face image (above) was sent to friends through
a Google survey with the following note:
*This graphic might appear on one of the 1st pages
of my graphic design thesis. Looking at this image,
what does this graphic mean to you?*

The smiley face is a simple and iconic symbol. To me, this reads as lightheartedness friendliness, and happiness.

—Dee Clements   Artist

The smiley graphic has lost its meaning due to ubiquity. The wrapping text may have a subversive, perhaps even an angry message.

—Ohn Ho   Designer

Happiness, positive, not serious. That could be good or bad. There is a house music feeling.

—Iker Gil   Architect & Founder

I see cavernous meaninglessness: chaos, horror, a fear of death.

—Eliza Chen   Precocious Interloper

A fun and happy graphic. This image feels relatable — a pleasant reminder to accept and appreciate successes. To pause and be grateful. Big eyes.

—Elaine Lopez   Graphic Designer

The graphic communicates to me that this is actually not enough.

—Kana Hamamoto   Psychologist

CONTEXT

WHAT ARE WE SEEING/SAYING?

Reminds me of feeling anxious and always questioning if what I'm doing is enough or not!

— **Tasnima Tanzim**   **Multidisciplinary Designer**

This graphic is satirical in nature. It speaks to our willingness as humans or perhaps, more specifically as Americans to find comfort in complacency.

— **Ashlie Norris   Associate Director**

I take it quite literally … that being kind to one another is more important than is often assumed.
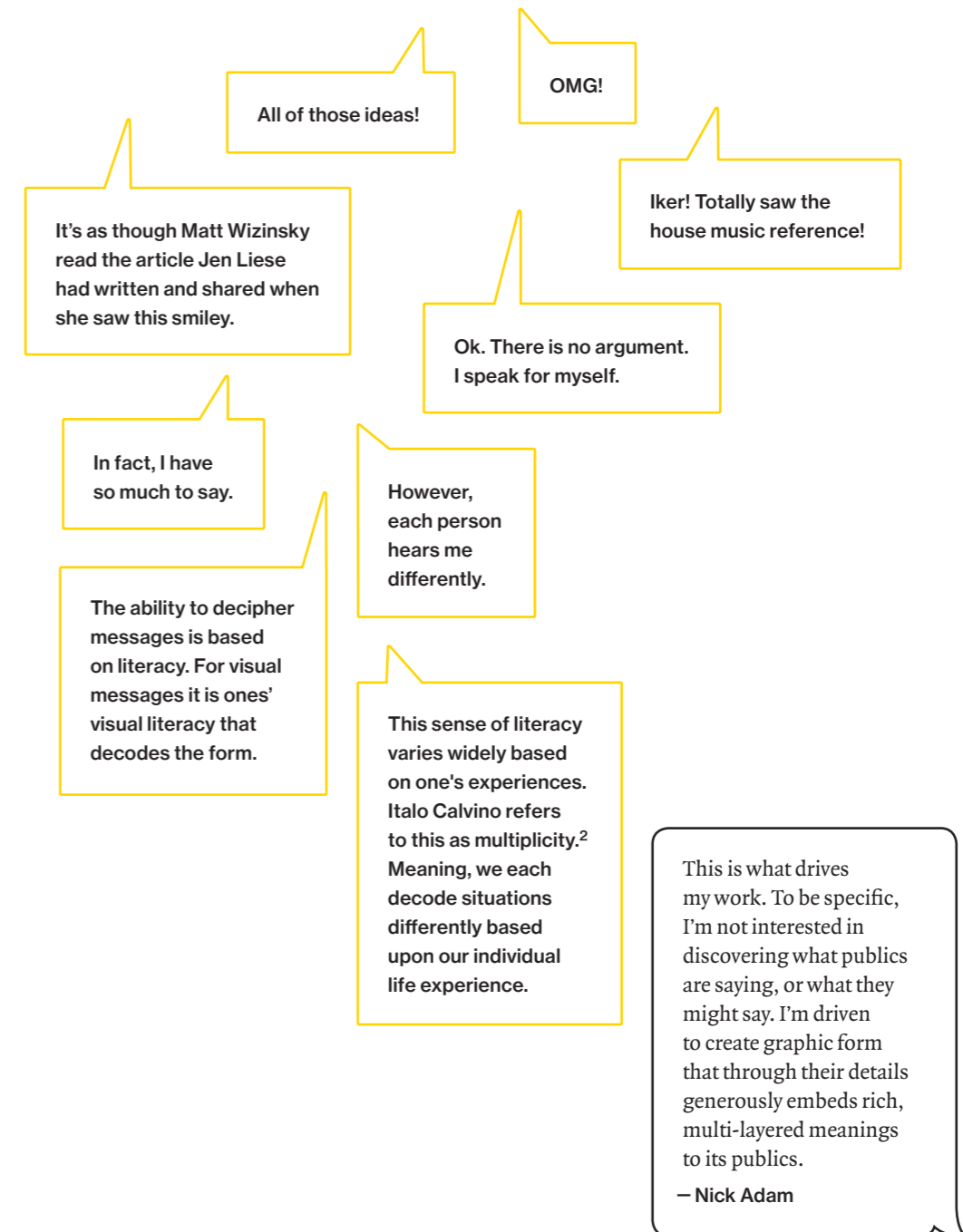
— **Konstantinos Nakos   Police Officer**

This graphic signifies a moment when we realize that a simpler life with less makes more sense than striving for a more dynamic life filled with struggle, high risk, and hustle. You look around and realize that a life worth living is already here and then you accept that maybe you're really not extraordinary. Deep down, you'll always wonder what would've happened if you had stuck with your gut and fought harder for your dreams. However, for now … a forced smile gets you through the day.

— **Joe Winograd   Human Being**

This trite smiley face is meant to indicate 'all's okay' or 'OK! Good! / Great!' So, maybe this is an ironic nod to surrendering all will or power to offer a more nuanced response … or, it is to admit total overload.

— **Bethany Johns   Professor**

From Harvey Ball to Wal-Mart to Emojis, the yellow smiley face has become rather ubiquitous. Making it instantly recognizable and versatile. Slippery to define on its own. It speaks to me of generic goodwill — whether that's a personal message or an inducement to buy cheap crap depends entirely on the context. The text extends the uncertainty. The word 'maybe' says to me that the author is unsure. The word 'enough' invites subjectivity of the viewer (enough what? enough for whom? enough for you?). The ellipses suggest an open-endedness that moves both ways.

— **Matt Wizinsky   Graphic Designer**

It means — don't strive for the stars, be happy with where you are. It means be content, and I hate that.

— **Lyndon Valicenti   Principal**

It says that kindness and human decency is all we basically need :)

— **Matthew Hoffman   Artist**

MAYBE THIS·IS·ENOUGH

All of those ideas!

OMG!

Iker! Totally saw the house music reference!

It's as though Matt Wizinsky read the article Jen Liese had written and shared when she saw this smiley.

Ok. There is no argument. I speak for myself.

In fact, I have so much to say.

However, each person hears me differently.

The ability to decipher messages is based on literacy. For visual messages it is ones' visual literacy that decodes the form.

This sense of literacy varies widely based on one's experiences. Italo Calvino refers to this as multiplicity.[2] Meaning, we each decode situations differently based upon our individual life experience.

This is what drives my work. To be specific, I'm not interested in discovering what publics are saying, or what they might say. I'm driven to create graphic form that through their details generously embeds rich, multi-layered meanings to its publics.

— Nick Adam

1.   Liese, Jennifer.
No Laughing Matter *Cabinet Magazine*, Spring 2005

2.   Calvino, Italo.
Six Memos for the Next Millennium, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

The gender looks non descriptive but I consider it male. The action is walking and the yellow diamond sign signals slow and caution. Walk slow and cautiously, man.

— Dee Clements   Artist

Looking at this silhouetted figure, it seems to be an older man walking. The pace seems slower … due to the stance of the figure.

— Anu Murthy   Visual Designer

A standard, neutral figure, which actually reads as male. that appears to be mid-stride, walking across a street.

—R.C.   Designer/Artist

Def a male, walking.

— Konstantinos Nakos   Police Officer

Man, walking.

— Iker Gil   Architect & Founder

The gender is clearly male, and the action shows a very awkward walk.

— Kana Hamamoto   Psychologist

Male walking across the street.

— Emily Jones   Interior Architect

Is this a male figure because of what is drawn or because there are female figures shown in other places ?[3]

— Michael Rock   Designer

3.   Rock, Michael. "The Social Function of a Designer." Interview by Nick Adam, 03/29/2018, *This is public work.*, (Thesis, RISD, 2018), Page 58.

Affect, Effect, Aeffect, Etc.

The designer does not work alone, nor does the client own the work — ownership of the work is shared across the designers that make it, the patrons that commission it, and the publics that engage with it.

the 444-4444 For the Injured ads blanket the city of Providence, RI

Often, it is the public that is forgotten about in graphic design. On a given project, audiences might be strategically and tactically targeted, but rarely does a designer or the commissioner think beyond their primary audience. Nor is the work designed to go beyond an intended effect: *to go to the museum, desire to be like these athletes, get a six inch sub, am I injured? — let's sue somebody!* Perhaps by considering the artifacts of design as belonging to the public realm, as being in the public's possession, we can begin to elevate the dialogue, and the project, beyond the first-order service that it was commissioned for. John Dewey's philosophy on art, presents art not as something special, but as something that takes on a significant role in a person's daily experience.[1] That through aesthetic enjoyment, one gains a real understanding of life.

philosopher John Dewey's seminal book on aesthetics

ART AS EXPERIENCE

What Dewey says exactly is, 'In order to understand the aesthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of [a person], arousing [their] interest and affording [them] enjoyment as [the person] looks and listens: the sight that hold the crowd — the fire engine rushing by … What Coleridge said of the reader of poetry is true in its way of all who are happily absorbed in their activities of mind and body: 'The reader should be carried forward, not merely by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, not by a restless desire to arrive at the solution, but by the pleasurable activity of the journey itself.'[2]

Dewey speaks to aesthetic outside of art and museum and within the daily life, I think of the design project's role and participation in creating our visual landscape and furthering visual culture. Reconsidering a given design project beyond its first-order, informational and service-based considerations is an opportunity for design to participate in another kind of service, one on a larger scale.

What is the tone of a work? What is its message? How might it go further, and how can it say more or add something significant to the environments, our experiences, and lives? Design is, ultimately, public work.

NOW TRENDING, MONOCULTURE

We have come to expect to be underwhelmed by our public spaces. What I see represented in public is a rather narrow visual range. So much is looking so similar. It is not that the things we encounter are being made without skill. The situation today is quite the contrary to that.

I feel like I've been here … guess what city this is?

Today, with our easy access to design tools, tutorials, and knowledge, the baseline of design work is technically highly skilled. We are all content creators, generating visuals on a daily basis. The mediocrity I perceive today is less about skill and more about how similar everything feels. As we are all now content-creators, with ready access to tools and instruction, what does the designer offer that is different from this with respect to content and craft?

77% of cars today are neutral colors this is up from 59% in 2014

PPG is the twenty billion dollar global color conglomerate that conducts and publishes annual color reports. In their 2017 *Car Color Report* released on Oct 26, 2017, shows that 76% of North America cars are neutral colors — Black, Silver, White, or Grey.[3] This report also shows that the same colors make up 77% of the cars in the world. Comparing their 2017 report to the 2014 edition, this percentage is up from 59%. PPG has also recently announced their 2018 color of the year. It's *Black Flame*, which they describe as 'statement-making black.' How inspirational.

What is the problem with all of this arguably good-looking stuff? The adjacent possible of sameness, and the lack of meaning and intention in its reproduction. This emergence of visual monoculture is why Jan Tschichold disbanded his theory of the *New Typography*,[4] which was absolutist in decree of how to use type. He came to see the rigidity and sameness, the lack of formal and conceptual expression that he initially advocated for, as leading towards Fascism. It is important to acknowledge that the Graphic Design field did not follow the *New Typography* theories lockstep. The popularity of the theory at the time led to a visual dominance similar to the kind of visual monoculture we are experiencing today. What we see inevitably informs what we make.

The decrease of diverse and meaning-filled forms in our public space contributes to a condition and builds an expectation of sameness. This sameness within visual culture helps support a context social and political sameness. And it is here that things sound like what Tschichold feared.
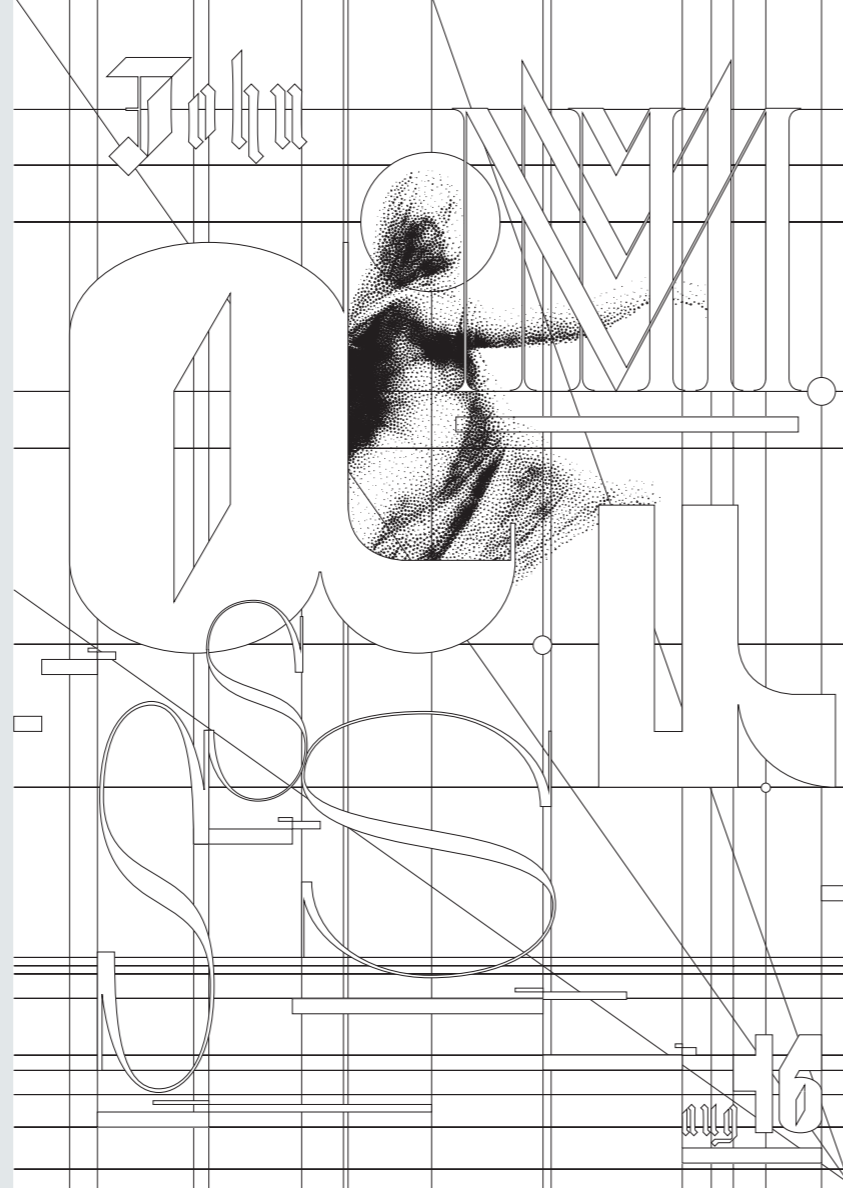
METHOD: EFFECT, AFFECT, AEFFECT ETC.

Each member of the public has had a different life experience: this allows them to read each piece of design differently. While it is likely no one ever consciously reads all the connections of a work completely, I believe that they comprehend and feel that there is an intention. I refer to this as *aeffect* — the experiential quality of graphic design. *Aeffect* is way the design feels and how it makes one feel. It is in these moments of *aeffect* that the designer is present through the conscious choice of an idea or a detail that draws the viewer in, and elevates the piece beyond the banal and quotidian things we see most moments of our day. I design with intention of creating *aeffect* — perceptible in the overall experience of the work, even if the significance of move is not understood.

Aeffect is constructed through craft. Craft, within my practice, is not solely based in technical proficiency of the execution, but also in how visual language is conceived and developed. I develop graphic form through a process of research-based investigation, analysis, and translation of material-based evidence in order to connect the design making to the subject or idea of the work. Through research I uncover inspiration, and then use these observations and details to construct specific visual systems. This requires formal consideration of the styles, forms, shapes, composition, line-weights, and measurable units used to construct these complex systems. This requires new letters, at times entire typefaces, and in some cases, new technology.

My approach to design resembles building or engineering, to construct harmonious connections across the subject and function of the piece. By focusing the act of making on these formal, internal logics, I attempt to increase meaning and intentionality into every maneuver. Embedding meaning in this way is my method for generating *aeffect* — an experience for the public.

MORE THAN A POSTER

As the Swiss Modernist, Armin Hofmann stated in his essay *My Poster Work*, a poster does more than simply supply information on the goods it advertises; it also reveals a society's state of mind. I believe we can extend Hofmann's view beyond the idea of the poster to span across all public facing artifacts of design — billboards, interfaces, etc.

My project, *Here Lyeth, A Monumental Book*, (pg. 297) closely examines the detail, craft, and ideas of 17 – 18th century New England gravestones to reveal the 'design' intentions of early U.S. stone carvers. The monumental book ends by contrasting these empathetic and passionate executions of the past with the default face of current online gravestone buying. Will future archeologist hypothesize that Apple Chancery was of utmost cultural significance? Or will they guess, correctly, that the designed systems that hearlds efficiency was not designed for meaningful impressions?
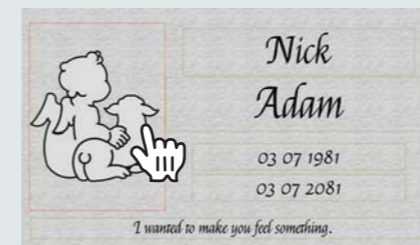
What do these default fields of graves say about our society? What are the effects of this kind of mass styling? What does it mean to produce something with no care? Certainly, these questions have, the percussive factor of forever with respect to the emotional subject of our dead and our future dead selves. More generally, what do these kinds of mass default options offer us?

Once brought into the world, these kinds of designed artifacts — the graves, street signs, ironic graphics, books, posters, billboards, bus-shelter ads, identity systems, operating systems, websites, books, memes, typography, apps, dashboards of vehicles — become the surface by which we negotiate, and know the world. They are the base layer of our experience, which becomes the reality that plays a large role in thinking about and shaping the future. My conversation with Michael Rock (pg. 58) introduced me to Harvard Law School Professor, Roberto Unger, who refers to this as 'formative context' — how things start off as ideas, then evolve to be established routines that are seemingly self-evident, and then are institutionalized — tradition becomes law.[5] Unger cautions us that what follows is the idolatry of institutions, where we, as a society, no longer question what we see. For example the current graves or the crosswalk sign have become so established, so much part of what is, that we can no longer see them.
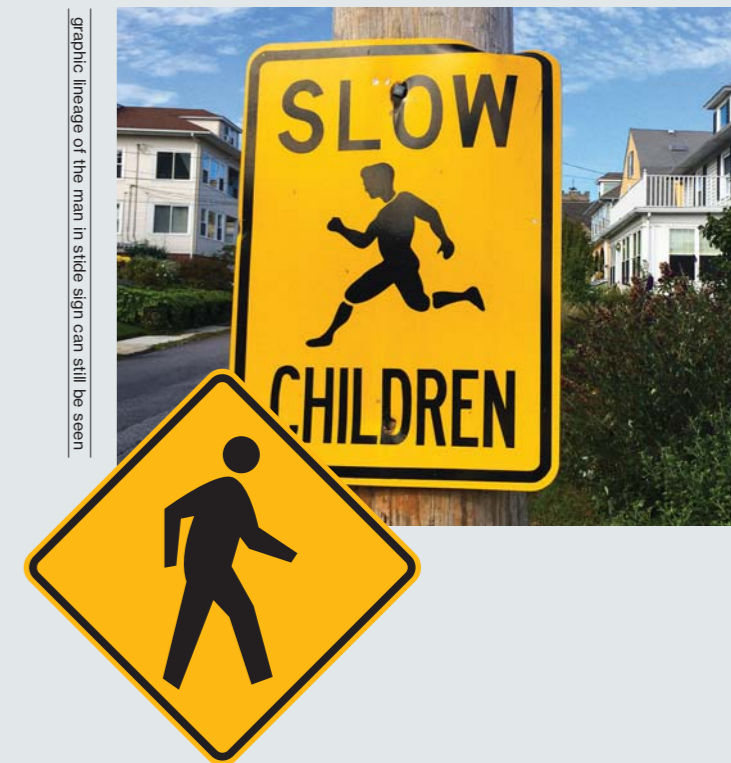
Perhaps the pedestrian crossing and children crossing signs were not intended to read as masculine in nature, but this tends to be the widely-held perception (pg. 42). English and French are traditionally default masculine languages — might our visual language also have gender-based defaults, like these signs?

This is why I am interested in discussions and demonstrations of formal logic and visual rationalization within the process of design. Seeing and knowing how something works and what makes it work elevates the conversation of making across all participants, and opens up new moments and methods to intentionally craft the message and meaning. Might the default masculine presence within our words and visual language have some connection to ongoing gender inequality?

Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley, curators of the 3rd Istanbul Design Biennial, *Are We Human?*,[6] and authors of the subsequently titled book, frame their focus on *Superhumanity*[7] as the idea that the planet itself has been completely encrusted by design as a geological layer. There is no longer an outside to the world of design. Design has become the world. Their argument is that the process and artifacts of design are typically conceived and engaged in discourse around service to the human, but that what we must begin to understand is the impact design has in radically reshaping the minds and actions of humans.

In the last year, many of the design-leads that worked on the iPod, iPhone, and iPad have been speaking out on their lives greatest regret — releasing these products without further under-standing of their consequence in our lives.[8]

How Apple Is Giving Design A Bad Name

11.10.15

For years, Apple followed user-centered design principles. Then something went wrong.

MIT Technology Review

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A View from **David Byrne**

Eliminating the Human

We are beset by—and immersed in—apps and devices that are quietly reducing the amount of meaningful interaction we have with each other.

August 15, 2017

The 2017 *Copenhagen Letter*[9] acknowledges technology's role in consuming society, ethics; our entire existence. It calls for a commitment from developers and technologists to organize and hold each other accountable. With 4,224 signatures as of April 28, 2018, this feels like too narrow a focus. It is a necessary gesture, but it does not take a big enough bite out of the issues we face today. Broadening the focus on design we might be able to have a more critical discussion on what exactly we all are doing — to think critically about what we make, how we make it, as well as, who the patrons are, and the publics who live with it.?

My work on and with the Chicago Police (pg. 112) explores the visual identity of its *force* by focusing on the squad car. The project focuses on the domestic representation of squad cars, in relation to international ones. It seems, within the U.S., that we are intentionally designing officers to appear aggressive, whereas other nations focus on a visual presence that appears urgent. This contrast suggests that the U.S. is accelerating its projection of aggression through its use of authoritative aesthetics. This is reinforced by language, with the renaming of the *Ford Crown Victoria* as the Ford *Interceptor*.

The project maps the trajectory of this aesthetic model as expressed across the motion-graphic typology of Breaking News. In a metamodernist moment, we then are presented with real-virtual similitude through the rise of first-person shooter games where you select your character based on which city's police force you'd like to be on. Once in uniform, you virtually shoot members of the public.

While these critical discussions of design and impact at large scale often revolve around architecture, city planning, industrial design, and other more tangibly operational fields, these conversations do not consider the role of style, aesthetics and the designed surface. With regard to complicated societal problems like police brutality and gun culture, I am not saying graphic design is 'the solution', or even 'a solution.' But it is worth considering its role. Revisiting Hoffman's statement, that a poster reveals a society's state of mind, offers a logical basis for an understanding of how design operates at large-scale. If a work of design reveals a society's state of mind, might it also help shape society's state of mind? If so, where does that leave the designer who produces the work? Aesthetics alone is no solution. But it is worth considering its role, not as a cloak or lens, but as a tool that creates the reality we see and thereby accept. This is where I identify the opportunity in my practice as designer, to design for the public, and for *aeffect*, in an attempt to thoughtfully participate in humanity.
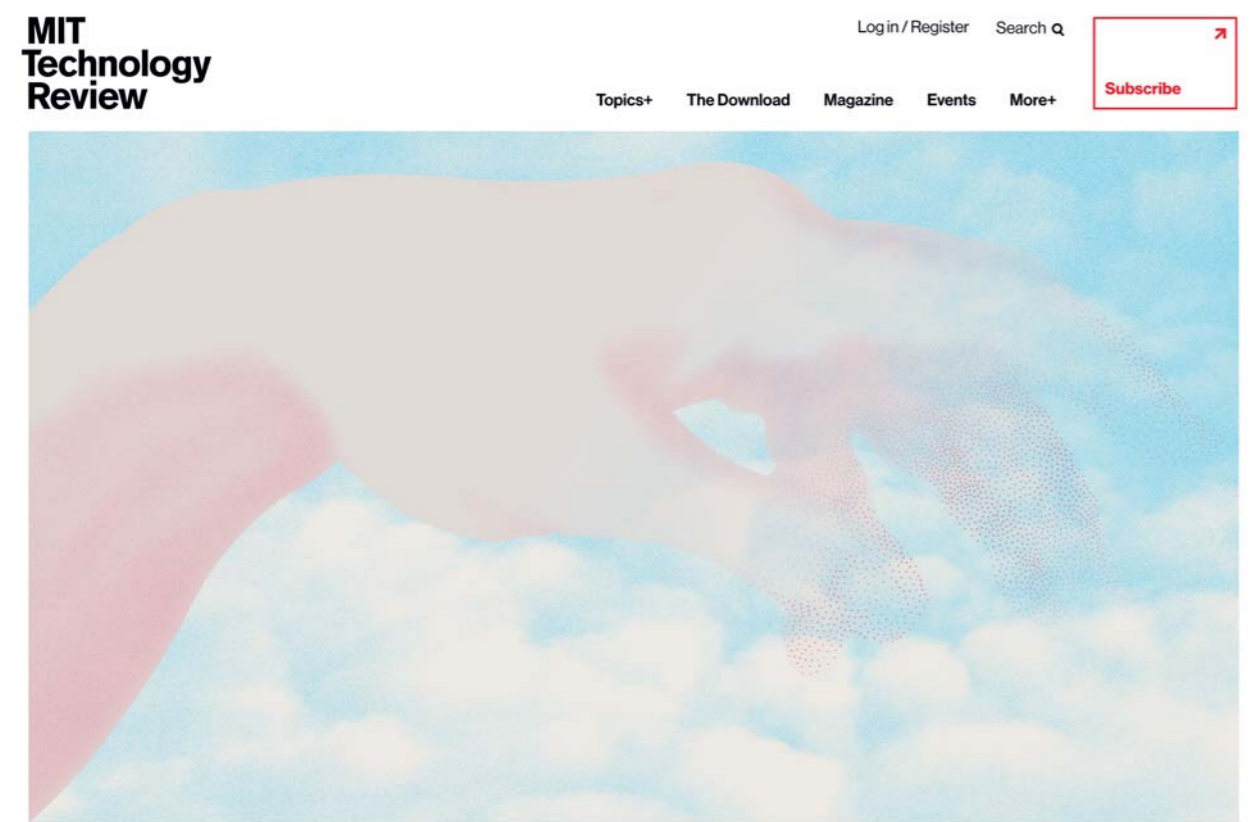
1. Rand, Paul. *Design, Form, and Chaos*, 1993, Yale University Press

2. Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*, Penguin Publishing Group, 1934

3. Automotive Color Trends 2017, PPG, accessed 4-29-18. newsroom.ppg.com/autocolor2017

4. Tschichold, Jan *The New Typography*, University of California Press, 2006.

5. Unger, Roberto. *False Necessity: Anti-Necessitarian Social Theory in the Service of Radical Democracy*, (London: Verso, 2002)

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What are we leaving behind?

these petroglyphs of Norway's Alta Fjord are artifacts of cultures from 4200 – 500 BC

The markings shown on the left are graphic in nature. They can also be viewed as a form of diagrammatic narrative. Today, we see them as documentation of how human life was once lived, however, that is a relatively recent understanding.

From 4200 BC to 500 BC markings like these functioned as a guide. They informed their publics of the capacity to navigate water, to catch fish, and to use fish to hunt larger animals.

This marking was recently discovered in 1973 at Norway's northernmost point of the Arctic Circle — Altafjord. Visual language such as this separates prehistory from history. Across the 3700 years in which Altafjord was inhabited, these markings shaped the culture of their publics.

What are the markings made today saying to us? How might these markings we make be shaping culture? What will they convey about us 6300 years from now?

Conversations with Rick Valicenti

This conversation was built from 20 years of articles, interviews, lectures, and speeches — only one of which I was active in. Rick Valicenti was selected for this piece due to his history and philosophy of experiential thinking towards graphic design. He describes this as, 'Every designed artifact we produce sets out to transcend the service it was commissioned to deliver.' Rick is a Chicago Designer and the founding Partner of Thirst, (3st). He is also a past collaborator turned father-in-law of mine. This idea of a built dialog is inspired by Kay Rosen's *Constructed Conversation* and Gavin Wade's technique of *Upcycling*.
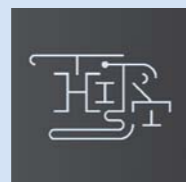
Rob Dewey   Remember *Thirst*? The bastard child of Lester Beall's *Dumbarton Farm* and Warhol's *Factory*? This graphic design collective led by Rick Valicenti is considered by many to be iconoclastic, imposing its aesthetic on hapless clients. The reality is somewhat more complex.[4]

Rick Valicenti   Is there a way that the designer can create something more compelling or inviting or catalytic, so that the conversation can be re-inspired and started all over again?[12] My perfect day shares everything that is the practice of Graphic Design. Right there alongside the passionate and the curious. Together we do all we generously can, to midwife the most thoughtful and meaningful work out into the world. We respond to the challenges that are both fun and self-initiated. And when that day is done, we show up again to do it over in the hope of getting it right.[7]

Steven Heller   Before founding *R. Valicenti Design* in 1981 in Barrington, Illinois, Rick was practicing conventional corporate design and heading toward a career of blandness.[6]

Michael Bierut   Valicenti started out as the consummate professional. An early triumph was the lurid and ubiquitous red Helvetica Bold logo for Chicago's *Jewel* supermarket chain; in his book *Emotion as Promotion*, Rick surrounds it with over four dozen similar logos, viewing his role as the Patient Zero of the gruesome Helvetica Bold epidemic with a mixture of pride and horror.[8]

Rick   My on-the-job training as a designer followed an MFA in photography and two years of agency production work at *Bruce Beck Design*.[11]

Michael Bierut   Nearly a decade of buttoned-up success followed. Valicenti then threw it all away. After eight years of operating a design-as-vendor-operation titled R. Valicenti Design, he writes, I decided I would build a practice only for a discerning clientele.[8]

Rick   I opened the design practice in 1981 with a most un-inspired title *R. Valicenti Design*. In 1988, I was compelled to change the direction of the studio towards creating *art with function*, and was seeking out a new moniker. While in correspondence with Phillipe Starck, he let a typo slip … *3st* instead of *3rd*, which inspired the expression I was looking for: *Thirst*. [8]

Marian Bantjes   If graphics are a language, Rick uses it to Shakespearean levels — abundance, exuberance and sheer delight in visual play.[5]

Marla Hart   In the realm of advertising, Valicenti's Barrington design firm, *Thirst*, is what snowboarding is to skiing. Same white stuff, new rules. [1]

Rick   Designers (or many of them) everywhere have been hiding behind their professional practice/process and extremely well-crafted production values. Rather than attempt to create real meaningful content for their audience starved with an appetite for something meaningful; some 'human' contact, these designers have surrendered their very being as they stand face to face with the challenge of awakening their audience's imagination. I suppose feeling passion would be just too much to ask of the dead. [2]

Steve Heller   Why do you hate design?[6]

Rick   As much as I take delight in the presence of great design in my life and community, I feel so violated by the shit that is everywhere; bad design seems to ooze into culture at every turn. This is the design that I hate. It is a reflection of scant respect for those who must be in contact with it.[6]

SHOW BOAT MUSIC BY JEROME KERN BOOK AND LYRICS BY OSCAR HAMMERSTEIN
BASED ON THE NOVEL 'SHOW BOAT' BY EDNA FERBER   LYRIC OPERA OF CHICAGO

Susan Mathieson   It is never ordinary.[1]

Rick   While style is certainly present in my expressions, it is both the message and a sidekick to the messenger. In my case, I am usually very conscious of what style I use, and in using a particular style I let it speak its legible code in concert with whatever I am saying. In my work, style is complicit.[6]

Peter Sellers   I want you to make type. Like a *Peterbilt* truck. I want it to collide.[1]

Rick   I subscribe to the mindset that everything has meaning. That suggests that even the cake's decoration is to be taken in as part of the cake's experience. Sometimes the frosting on the cake is good to look at and makes the cake; other times it even satisfies one's taste.[6]

Rob Dewey   True, *Thirst* often uses archetypal imagery, loose wordplay, digital illustration, and collage — a form that is seductive to some, horrifying to others. But there is no personal style, Valicenti insists. Just honesty. The work is honest to the artful process through which it evolves, honest to the values of its makers. *Thirst* embraces provocation to gain attention, communicate, and instigate change. And Valicenti accepts himself for what he is: a middle-class surrealist who has taken a lot of heat from his peers for preaching from the sidelines of the field.[4]

Scream if you feel it

Rick   The seduction of the big brand name is very real; the excitement of the phone call from New York or Frankfurt or Tokyo is quite attractive; the notion of designing a brand mascot or national advertising image is a thrill. But somewhere along the way the glitter would fade and it would be just me and the process. I never woke up with a real sense of purpose or a relationship I could value. So in the end, if I would not want to have a new client wake up in my house and share breakfast with my family, why should I give up my time for them?[8]

Grant Rinder   He throws traditional interpretations of violence aside. 'Those vehicles for expression, while they are completely valuable, I would argue that the public who comes in contact with them — and we all come in contact with them every day if we swipe our phones, read a news, watch any cable television news network — are numb to those interventions,' Valicenti says.[12]
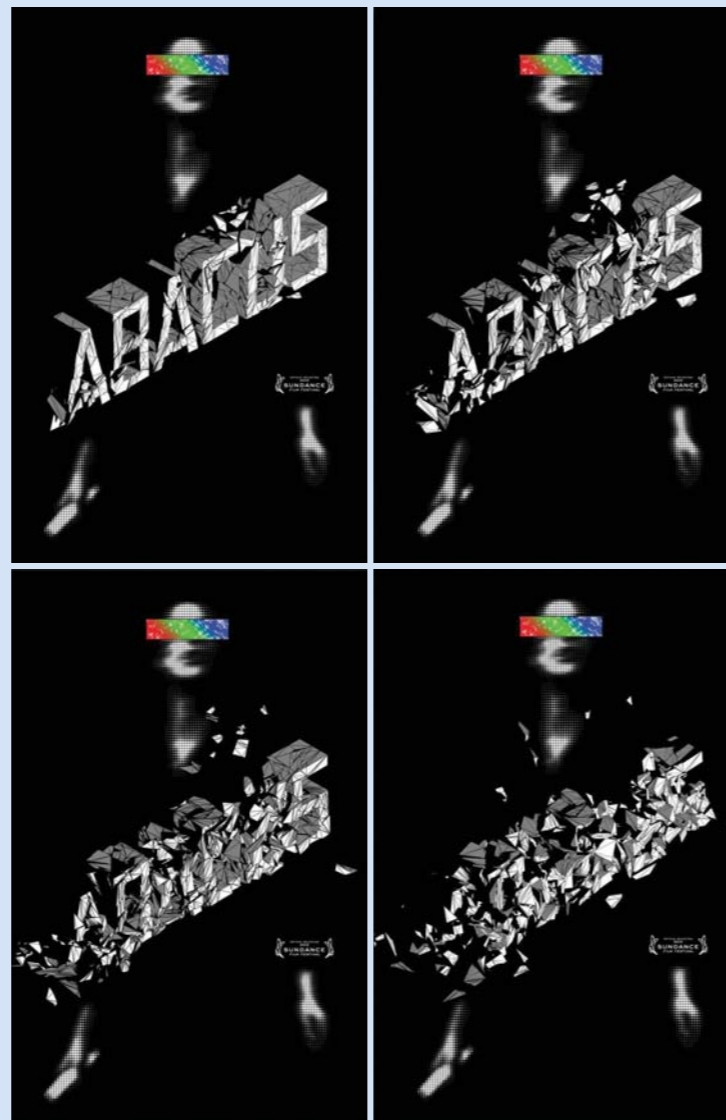
Andy Butler   Valicenti also is a significant figure on the international design scene, leading teams of volunteer designers around the world to tackle urban problems as part of a group called Moving Design. He's leading a team of 20 designers looking at ways to address the problem of air quality in pollution-clogged Beijing.[11]

Rick   As a designer, not a politician, not an activist, I wanted to respond to them and give the students an example of how to move their responses to these issues to a place that transcends the normal world of graphic design intervention, i.e. infographics, public service announcements, protest posters. [12] As a mentor and educator, my perfect day has me consciously doing all I can to ensure the next generation of designers have laser-focused aim and enough stones for their slingshot. And as a citizen my perfect day has me ignoring the request to communicate the messages of no value. Choosing instead to craft messages of keepsake and social value.[7]

Stefan Sagmeister   Really the big problem of coming up with a good piece of design is that it is so unbelievably difficult. And this whole thing gets even more difficult if you have to come up with a good piece of design over many years and in the case of our *National Design Award* winner tonight, over many decades. It really becomes truly crazy impossible if you need to come up with these good pieces of design in many different directions, many different conceptual directions, many different stylistic and formal directions, and that these directions actually matter. That they are relevant to the time, that they remain influential. I think that I actually know only one graphic designer in the United States who has really, truly, been able to pull this off over many decades. That is our *National Design Award* winner Rick Valicenti.[7]
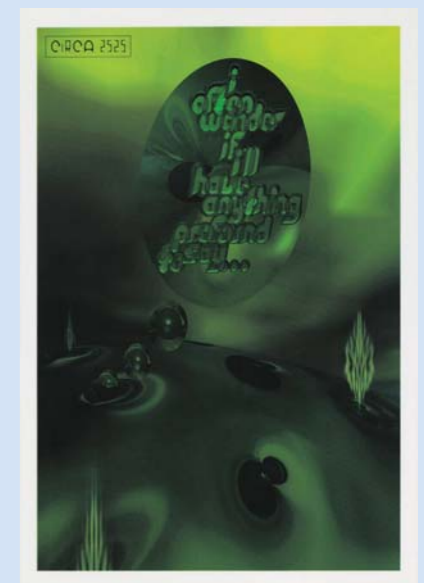
Marian Bantjes   One piece of his reads, I often wonder if I'll have anything profound to say, but to those who look, it's clear that he already has.[5]

Rick   If I may, there are so many better people out there than me. Please find them and enjoy them … then share them with me![13]

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2.   King, Patric. Exclusive Interview. *Speak Up*, June 5–14/2003

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9.   Valicenti, Rick. Creative Mornings. Speech, Gravity Tank, Chicago, IL, June 2012

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13.   Valicenti, Rick. Backword. Email with Nick Adam, 10/17/2017

SUPER

VISION

supervision, *n*   first used, 1475
:   The action or function of oversee-
ing, directing, or taking charge
of a person, organization, activity,
etc —*Oxford English Dictionary*

Super Vision is my idea of what,
at best, a graphic design relationship
can yield—*a super vision.*

Discussion with Michael Rock

Michael Rock is a founding partner and the Creative Director of 2 × 4 — a global design consultancy headquartered in NYC. He is also, he is the director of the Graphic Architecture Project at Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture. I selected Michael for this talk due to my thesis's connection to his most recent lectures and interviews where he shares his latest interest. A summary of these ideas can be found in the title of his November '17 lecture at the Berkeley Art Museum — *We Must Conjure Our Gods Before We Obey Them*.[1]

PUBLIC (RE) ASSEMBLY
THE WAY IN WHICH WE ORGANIZE A COHERENT WORLD.

9:02 / 1:26:24

Rock's Berkeley Art Museum lecture on YouTube

Nick Adam   Over the last 3 years, the lectures and articles you are publishing focus on an idea — The work we make allows people to better understand the world. [2] It seems the essence of this idea is that designers have a role in designing the world and our reality. Can you share with me what you believe are the implications of this and what are some opportunities that designers might consider?

Michael Rock   A lot of my thinking around this has been shaped by some recent readings. I was trying to define a basic question — What is it that designers do? There's a couple ways that I've been trying to get at this idea.

Michael   The first was Bruno Latour's writings[3] on the changing nature of the word *design*, as well as it's position in process. Over the course of nearly 100 years, it has changed from the end of the process to the beginning. In French, the word *design* started off by meaning *the decoration applied to the project in the final steps*. So if you are building a thing you might add a scroll onto it or inscribe it and that would be the design part of it. Over the course of time, design moved to the beginning of the process. Instead of saying that it was an application at the end of the directions it became it became the *how to* do something. In the transformation, there are implications, which rather than seeing designers as a finisher they are now an initiator. Today it's hard to imagine anything beginning without a design. This is a fairly new idea of what design is. It started to make me think of how design can be positioned in terms of what designers are doing.

The second aspect came out of reading Yuval Noah Harari.[4] Thinking about Harari's notion of what made humans *human* wasn't the agricultural revolution, it was a narrative revolution.

The way we formed communities bigger than the group of people that we actually knew was by accepting people as part of your social group. This was primarily done by sharing certain kinds of stories that we agreed on. To agree upon who was in or out of the group, graphic elements like jewelry, or amulets, that would signify from one person to another person that they were part of the clan. To indicate whether you're in or out of the group there was graphic means to depict it. This is necessary because you can't recognize strangers by themselves, but through graphic means you can recognize that you agree on the same things. This can be seen clearly in religious iconography. When someone puts a cross around their neck they are signaling that they share the same belief system as someone else that bears the cross.

the Jewish Star of David, Christian Cross, and Crescent

These graphic images allow you to instantly accept or reject a person. Harari builds this into large-scale arguments about what is a nation or what is a corporation or university but an entity founded with a shared belief system. The shared belief is reflected across a series of designed things like architecture, urban planning, street design, banners, logos, etc. that constantly reinforce the unity of a thing that is actually totally fictional. The organizational systems that we live by are often told by subtle graphic gestures. Because they are there all of the time they reinforced themselves in ways that make them seem real.

clocks sold at Design Within Reach described as the best in modern design
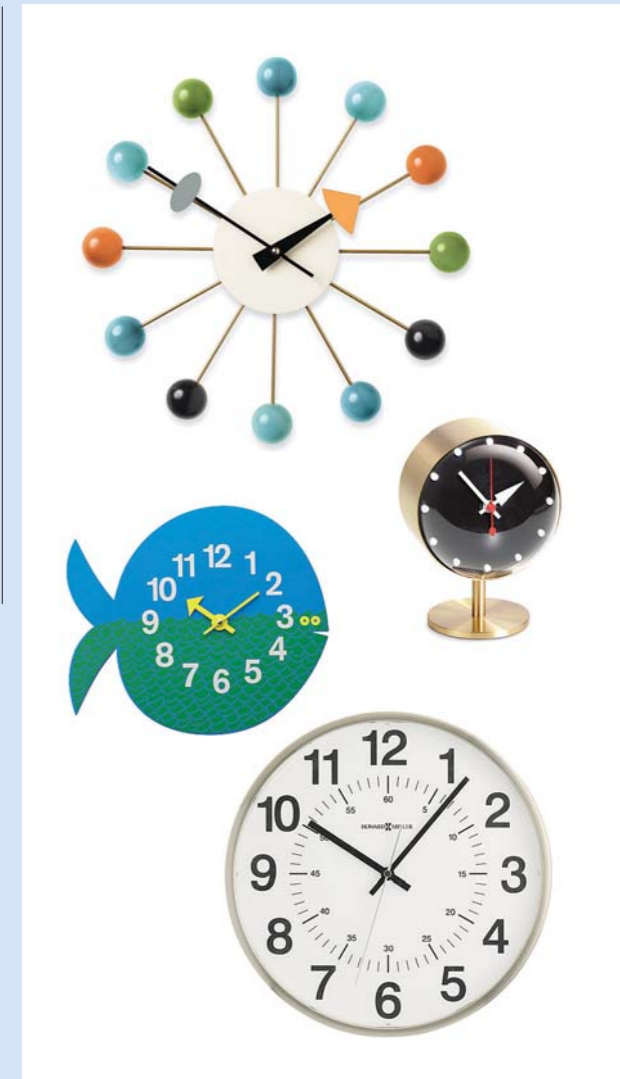
The more often they're represented the more real they seem. That is the way the systems we live by are enforced; designers continue to reinforce them. Often this is not conscious, most people just accept the system. An example I often give is — if I asked you to design the face of a clock you likely won't question that there should be 12 numbers, you would just accept that this is the system we go by. A designer could design clock faces their whole life and never question that this is a fictional way to divide time. The fact is, we constantly make clocks and that we measure time in this manner makes it harder to deny that idea.

The third thing I'm reading connected to my recent thoughts is Harvard Law School's brilliant Professor Roberto Unger.[5] He talks about *formative context* — primarily in legal terms, but it has strong applications in respect to design. *Formative context* basically states the things that start off as routine become traditions, and evolve over time into things that are seemingly self-evident, coherent, established, institutionalized. This is basically the idea that tradition becomes law.

So if something has been done a certain way for a given amount of time, it becomes the way you want it done, and it's then difficult to overturn it. Most things don't have rational beginnings, they have traditional ones and then they solidify into forms we institutionalize.

Out of that comes the second phase Unger uses which is *false necessity*. Where we start to feel these things are necessary they simply been around so long that we can't imagine it another way. Unger calls this the *idolatry of established institutions*. When something is established we often choose not to overturn it because life is comfortable. This is most clearly seen in the recent bathroom debates. Many people in our nation are comfortable with that division so we live by that division. When someone suggests that division may be artificial and we can invent a new one there's a lot of push-back because someone, earlier, had already decided that it was a necessity.

Michael Well, it is this notion of designers solidifying fictions that strikes me as what designers do. Solidifying fiction makes it usable in the world. Fiction becomes functional for us — typically, in hopes of making the world easy for us to navigate and to use. A form of convenience and a form of meaning that we come to understand the world by.

The third phase Unger calls *negative capability*. Which means even the things that seem so necessary are actually fragile because they're based on narrative. These things are open to resistance and re-composition; there is the ability to overturn them as they are not based on anything real. For me, this is a clear way to think about design. What designers do is we create false necessity, as we formalize narrative relationships. In the example of the bathroom that I just referenced, not so long ago there weren't two bathrooms there were three. Men's, Women's, and Colored. The Colored bathroom wasn't considered either male or female. It was a third category. Back then it seemed as weirdly unnatural to transgress these doors as today people feel it is weirdly unnatural to rethink the male and female doors. But the reason they feel natural is that there are doors, there are rooms, there are signs. The designer at some point designed those three rooms, the three doors, and the three signs. Those things make fiction reality in that you have to deal with the physicality of the fiction. Just by a person designing them, it forces the category to be true.

Nick By true you are speaking to the idea being physically realized — a solid that becomes undeniably part of our world? That somehow the physical manifestation of the idea makes the general public simply accept the idea?

Nick This feels connected to the *Vision and Value*[6] series. In *Education of Vision*, György Kepes, stated that, Every human transforms the visual signals that they receive into structured, meaningful entities. And that the person's capacity to read their environment determines the quality of their life. During my first semester at RISD, your article on bathroom icons, *The Accidental Power of Design*[7] was published in the *New York Times*. Shortly after reading it, I began noticing the crosswalk sign, the ones that are on every block of every street in every city of the U.S. To me, the icon's weighting in the shoulders and thighs seem to be masculine qualities. This had me think of the pervasiveness of visual and verbal default masculine language and their unconscious influence on inequality. Perhaps the formal idea may not have been to put a man on the sign, however, this is often how the sign is read.

Michael And a great question to ask — is this is a male figure because of what is drawn or because there are female figures shown in other places? There are lots of readings we can have of these things, whether it's patriarchal or representative of a system of power. We can critique and analyze the system without even looking at the politics because the system is everywhere. There are many different types of power structures that are embedded into the things we make. There is nothing that's free from politics. All design is ideological in that way, as it represents the prevailing culture of the time. A different icon on the crosswalk might work, but it wouldn't be absent of politics. It would contain the ideology of the culture that created it.

I often refer to a quote from Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley from their 2017 Istanbul Design Biennial publishing, *Are we human?*[8] They say the planet has been encrusted in design. That there is now a geological layer. I like this metaphor. You can think of the earth as being a crust and on top of that is another — a design crust. This design crust is as factual as the earth underneath it. But the design crust is the one that we negotiate every day. They go on to say that there's basically nothing left that is undesigned. Even the things that are seemingly wild or are untouched are that way because we decided it, we designed the edge or the border. So they are as designed as anything else, and we have to negotiate it.

So what we have is this Earth and crust that has layers of systematic design on top of it. At times we see evidence of design systems that have been discarded and are no longer useful to us. Ones that were meaningful at one time but are no longer meaningful to us now. Design is very incomplete in how it is applied. You can see this in systems of marking that are no longer relevant to us now but you see bits and pieces. We keep building design on top of design which is now the subset of what we are making. We're not building on top of pure earth anymore. We are building on top of design that already exists and we just keep building more design systems on top of design systems.

Nick Do you see the crust that design creates as more of a cloak or a lens in which we all come to see the world by?

Michael It's certainly not a cloak in the sense that it hides something, that which is real. Cloak suggests a covering of something that's more real than it. This crust that design creates is the IT. The thing we make is our reality. It's a mistake to believe that there is a pure experience. The world is a world of our own construction. Design is constantly working to add or subtract to it. As you design you both remove and add — you're often replacing something that was there to make it better and improve its functionality or use or empathy. Design in general attempts to alleviate a problem or improve a situation. Design is optimistic in this way, even though it often fails at this. But that is the heart of design—it's an attempt to ameliorate a situation.

Nick As we come to see that it is the designer who creates the surfaces that we understand and navigate the world by, what do you see as the designer's responsibility to the publics that engage with the work?

Michael My basic question—*what is it that a designer does?*—Leads you to a larger question: *what is the social function of the designer?* In terms of— what is it that they provide to the community or to the planet?

Earlier, when I spoke about the clock face … designers can easily go about design without questioning the underlying assumptions of something. I would say at least 90% of designers today do just that. They accept the world as it is and simply add to it. The most significant design steps back and asks deeper questions. Then it exposes totally different ways of thinking about something. As the designer questions principles, this is where we get paradigm shifts, real changes. It allows us to see the fictions by which we are living. Harari would say this will be problematic — if design is based on fictional stories, sooner or later a design will collide with another fictional story that contradicts it, and then we will have to rethink it. One thing is certain: the prevailing fiction will be replaced by a newer one, a new way of thinking.

Roland Barthes
Mythologies
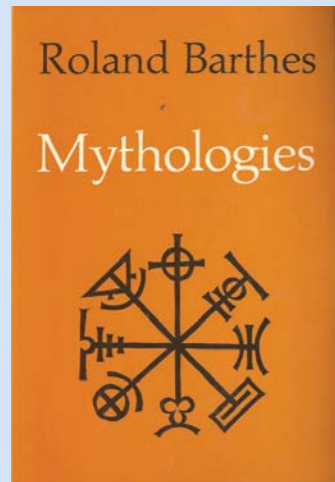
Nick The people that are creating design work as we just discussed—that allow its publics to see the fictions and provide new and alternative ways of seeing—do you see this as the role Barthes described of the mythologist? That the mythologist duty is to demystify reality?

Michael The older versions of semiology, in the way that Barthes talked about had a political intent to demask systems of power. Barthes uses a *quotation reference* — in describing whatever you look at is a series of references to something else. His thought was if one could untangle those lines, they could understand the power relationships underneath them. The way that I'm talking about it is a little different. I'm saying we have accepted that this power relationship is inextricably linked to the things themself, and you can't untangle them because they are supported by other ones. The question then — is there a central point that can be revealed or is there only a network of relationships? This would imply that you can shift where you are in the network, but that you cannot get beyond the network. This is the problem that everyone in the world is grappling with at the moment. Is there an outside?

Nick As we are saying that one of the designer's responsibilities is to question underlining assumptions, it seems important for designers to first understand the power and influence that their presence and their work has. How might more designers see this?

Michael It's an extremely complicated relationship. Most designers are a node in a network of relationships that rely on being maintenance to the myth or to the fiction, not undermining it. In most relationships, the point of the designer is to reinforce the myth. That is basically the entire business of branding — to codify the myth and give it visual containers. The visualization of the story — that is the business of design. There are only certain times where there is an opportunity to overcome this.

By understanding the way design works—that it reinforces fictional realities a designer can perhaps do a better job as they better understand their role and the design's function. I'm not saying that reinforcing fictional realities is bad. My point is that this is important work. It is through design work that we negotiate the world — it is how we understand the world. Without this work, it's difficult to perform any activity at all. By understanding the means, and the ability to manipulate that, the designer can perform the role in a more meaningful, perhaps, radical way. Rather than a designer acting unconsciously in what they are doing, they are conscious and can take a more positive role in their-fiction making function. It is perhaps then that the designer can exploit the role for other means.

Nick As designers become more familiar with their role and the function of their work with respect to the publics that it engages with, what do you see is the importance of creating work that is different from its surroundings and is perhaps more meaningful or more capable of transmitting rich stories through itself?

Michael <u>When design allows its publics to think differently or experience something different, enjoy in a different way, or occupy space in a different way, this is design that works well.</u> This is the type of work that makes you conscious of the world around you; that interaction with it gives you pleasure. The work of the designer is to be in dialog with the world. To bring the world ease, care, efficiency, and happiness. Design is not only about overturning, as there is an aspect that is about being empathic, helpful, and caring. Making the world more interesting, more caring, more intellectually stimulating … is how a design can make the world a better place.

effect
affect
æffect
et·cet…
era

Nick The way I've been thinking about design work that it does this is through the unification of the ideas of affect and effect. That through graphic form they can be joined as a singular idea. I'm not certain how to pronounce this, but, I've best described this through those two ideas creating one word, *æffect* — the way something feels is how it works.

Michael I think that is a reasonable way to think about it, that the affect and effect can become kind of simultaneous. A great goal for a designer would be to unify those two things, to make them coherent together. The way something works and the way something feels is closely linked. Investigating how those to things can come together is important.

We live in a great moment where there is so much opportunity for designers to have integral roles in the way the world works. This has been increasing over time. There is a different scale now because of technology, general awareness, the importance of communication — graphic designers are in this sudden renaissance of how they can affect the world. It's something we all should really embrace rather than shy away from.

Nick It seems to me, through all we have been talking about today, that there is a constant thread. That the opportunity of a designer to practice in a manner responsible to its publics' is to not see their task as solely yielding a thing, but as a thing that has the ability to greatly effect its publics' lives. Perhaps, as designers, we can begin to see the amount of authority the role of the designer has. I certainly don't mean this in a negative manner, or to underplay the role as a generous collaborator. I mean this to say, across the multi-tiered networks and relationships of a project the designer holds a key position — that is someone that understands the nuanced codes of the design and someone that play an integral part actualizing the idea into the world. Designers have many important choices to make. they can choose to engage, to speak up, to join in, and to frame conversations during the design process. Through these acts designers can communicate and persuade what should or shouldn't be considered.

Michael Yes. I really do believe that. There are a lot of very different ways one can be in the world. Designers have a choice to pro-actively engage.

It's urgent that we do so.

1. Rock, Michael. "We Must Conjure Our Gods Before We Obey Them," Lecture, Berkeley Art Museum, Nov 6/2017

2. Rock, Michael. 04. Michael Rock, interview by Jarred Fuller, *Scratching the Surface*, November 16/2016

3. Latour, Bruno. A Cautious Prometheus? A Few Steps Toward a Philosophy of Design. Keynote lecture for the *Networks of Design*, September 3/2000

4. Harari, Yuval Noah. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind.* (Israel: Harpers, 2011)

5. Unger, Roberto. *False Necessity: Anti-Necessitarian Social Theory in the Service of Radical Democracy*, (London: Verso, 2002)

6. Kepes, György. *Language of Vision*, (Chicago: Theobold, 1944)

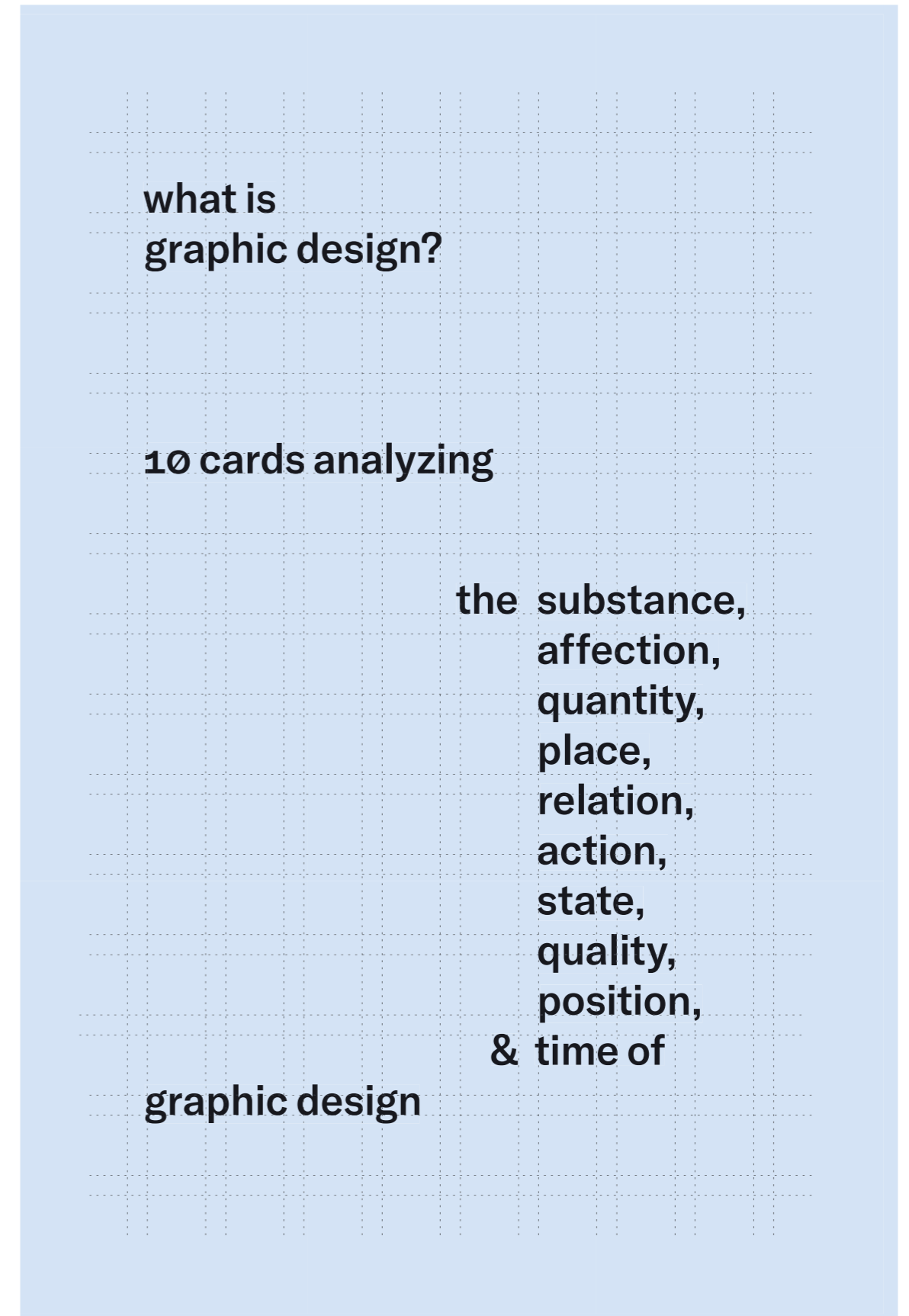7. Rock, Michael. The Accidental Power of Design, *The New York Times*, September. 15/2016

8. Beatriz Colomina and Mark Wigley. *Are We Human? Notes on an Archaeology of Design.* (Zürich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2016)

An Instrument for Vision

What is graphic design anyway? This felt like a fair question to begin my graduate studies in the fall of 2016.

Looking to the past I came across a 1937 edition of *Printing Art Quarterly*. The contents define graphic design simply — an inventive voice of industry and commerce. What is it today? This is how many outside of design still discuss it, as work in service to the client's business. This often excludes any idea of inventiveness.

Setting out to further understand and define my own point of view, I focused on the conversations going on in Studio 1 and Seminar 1, the readings, and my previous practice. The 10 categories of Aristotle's *Organon* were used to analyze and define ideas. Each category is represented on a single card with a front and a back.

Through simple, disciplined, typographic maneuvers, each card visually enacts my definition in two different ways. The fronts are imaginative, like a diagrammatic narrative, focusing on affect to introduce the idea. The backs bring additional context, defining the idea.

what is
graphic design?

10 cards analyzing

the substance,
affection,
quantity,
place,
relation,
action,
state,
quality,
position,
& time of

graphic design

the wrap cover that holds the card set

01 substance

communication

graphic

commun

graphic   design

communication
graphic   design

the substance of
graphic design is
communication

(PREDICATED BY)

front of card #1 at 50% scale

---

communication

Form is a vehicle for ideas — capable of transporting moments, memories, and messages across people, space, and time. ¶ Graphic design's beginnings were the Upper Paleolithic, impressionistic cave paintings of over 40,000 years ago. Formal advancements resulted in Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Phoenician alphabet. While the 1000 years of Dark Ages nearly removed our capacity to produce visual language — the marked surface and its meaning outlasted. ¶ Evolving from Gutenberg the heraldic symbols of the 17th century, graphic design today is closely related to the visual communications of 19th century Europe, however, as a practice and its visual appearance more closely resembles that of Swiss & American Modernism of 1930-1955.

"Designers are coming to have sympathy with, & an understanding of, the vital demands of those who pay their fees ... It is in that accomplishment that the designer is arriving at this proper job in the scheme of things, which is to sell goods."

Russell T. Sanford, Publicity Chairman, The Society of Typographic Arts August 1937

The 1937 edition of Printing Art Quarterly, shows Graphic Design as it was—technically a feat, tactically simple. While some visual cues remain today, this was simply our beginning. Today's designer operates their practice with ease in accessing all of history and an ever expanding advanced set of tools.

(PREDICATED BY)

back of card #1

---

02 affection

t o   m a k e   k n o   w n

t o   make   kn ow   n

to   m   e kno   w   n

t o m a k e k n o   w n

to make kno   wn

to   make   known

o   m   kn   o wn

the affection of
graphic design is
to make known

(TO SUFFER OR UNDERGO)

card # 2 is shown here at 100% scale

to make known

not to sell,
to solve,
or to save
the world

(TO SUFFER OR UNDERGO)

back of card #2

ø3 quantity

designer, graphic designer, ux designer, ui design... design manager, design director, design strategist... strategy director, art director, creative director, creative agency, agency, ad agency, design agency, design... firm, design studio, identity design, typ... editorial design, collateral design, package design, poster design, web... design, exhibition design, graphic design, graphics, & design

the quantity of graphic design is its products

(HOW MUCH)

---

its products

things — graphics design creative branding advertising digital

people — designer graphic designer digital designer ux designer ui designer design manager design director design strategist strategy director art director creative director creative

places — creative agency agency ad agency design agency design firm design department design studio studio

(HOW MUCH)

ø4 action

a reaction

t
o

c

r

e

a

t

e

the action of graphic design is reaction

(TO MAKE OR DO)

---

reaction

prompt design
brief design
curiousity design
desire design

05 place

public public public public

public public public public

public public

public

public

public

public

public public public

public public public

the place of
graphic design
is public

(WHERE)

public

absolutely
everywhe
all over

(WHERE)

early on in my time at RISD I was thinking about the publicness of graphic design

ø6 relation

his
hers
theirs
ours

ourshishers ourshishers
theirsourshishers theirsourshis
herstheirsourshishers theirsours
ourshishers theirsourshishers
ourshishers theirsourshis
herstheirsourshishers theirsours
ourshishers theirsourshishers
hishers theirsourshis
ourshishers theirsours
ourshishers theirsourshishers
theirsourshishers theirsours

the relation of
graphic design
is ours.

(TOWARD SOMETHING)

---

ours

"There was a big high wall there that tried to stop me. The sign was painted, said 'Private Property.' But on the backside, it didn't say nothing. This land was made for you and me."

Woody Guthrie,
This Land Is Your Land
Recorded in 1944

Guthrie's classic folk song brings attention to public communications and their influence on the state of the public. Within these designed messages he finds an identity and an opportunity to respond within the under-considered. Guthrie's response is about rebellion and freedom. While he refers to the backside of the signs to be ours, it is the frontside that brought him to this conclusion. ¶ The frontside of all messages assemble our visual landscape. Knowingly or not, these messages prompt us to react in one way or another. This relationship is one that influences and crafts of our point of view. ¶ By understanding this relationship, the keen graphic designer can advance the viewers thoughts.

(TOWARD SOMETHING)

ø7 state

graphic design

is
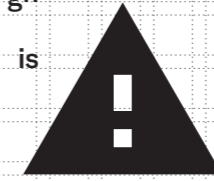
in crisis

crisis

is

in graphic design

the state of
graphic design
is crisis.

(TO HAVE OR BE)

---

crisis

there is growing uncertainty around what is design and what needs design

in the post designer-seat-at-the-table world everyone wants a designer at their table

software has become a monopoly

as access to knowledge and tools increases, it becomes easier to create good looking things

while the aesthetics bar is rising ubiquity of a common good rises too
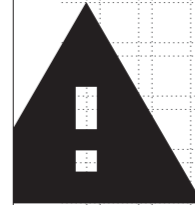
(TO HAVE OR BE)

ø8 position

updating
up- dating
updating

the position of
graphic design
is updating
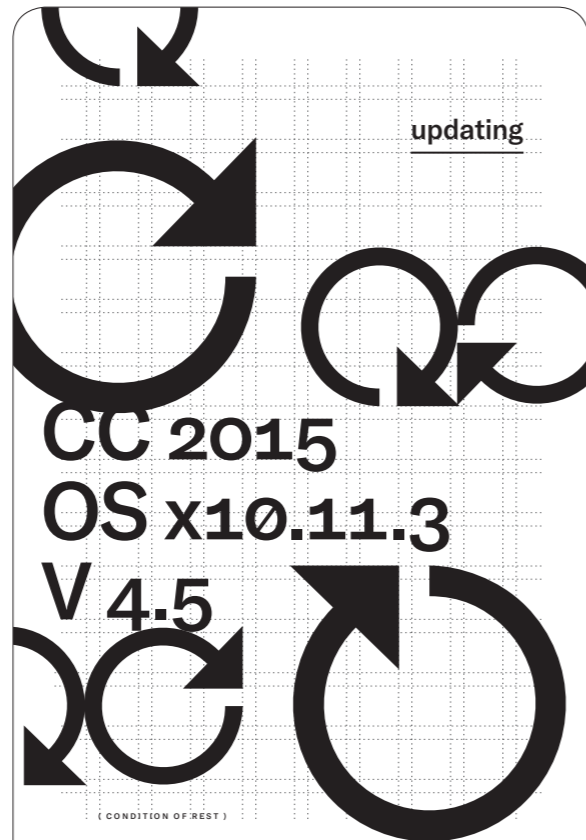
updating updating
updating updating
updating updating
updating updating

CC 2015
OS x10.11.3
V 4.5

(CONDITION OF REST)

ø9 quality

evolving
əvolving
e v o l v i n g
ə v ∞ l v i n g
e v o l v i n g
ə v o l v
evolving
əvolving

e v o
g o l
n i v

the quality of
graphic design
is evolving

(NATURE OF AN OBJECT)

---

evolving

but what's
next

(NATURE OF AN OBJECT)

1Ø time

o   w   n
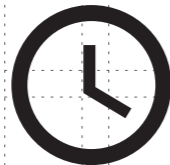
n   w

n   w   o

$

the time of graphic design is now

(RELATION TO COURSE OF EVENTS)

I still agree with the time of Graphic Design being related the perpetual now ...

---

now

time equals money equals now

(RELATION TO COURSE OF EVENTS)

... however, I see it as less do with money and more with the urgent need of designers to proactively engage the world

Road Standard

In my talk with Michael Rock on the social function of designers, he said that it is the designer's duty to question underlying assumptions. This is a hard thing to do, as systems of the world tend to be ubiquitous, making them seem unquestionable.

Perhaps a road to questioning that which seems solid starts by demonstrating the malleability of systems. *Road Standard* is a municipal-like typeface intended as a tool for designers. Through use, it demystifies the authority of municipal signage, and challenges its presumed legitimacy.

This typestyle is in a category of visual language I call *necessary signage*, which consist of symbols and signs that guide us through the world in safe, considerate manners. They've been designed to be read instantly and followed explicitly—YIELD, STOP, DO NOT ENTER, etc.

Beyond their first-order messages, these signs have things to say about us. While the crosswalk signs tell us people cross here, a deeper read can occur when we interrogate the symbol— a man in stride.
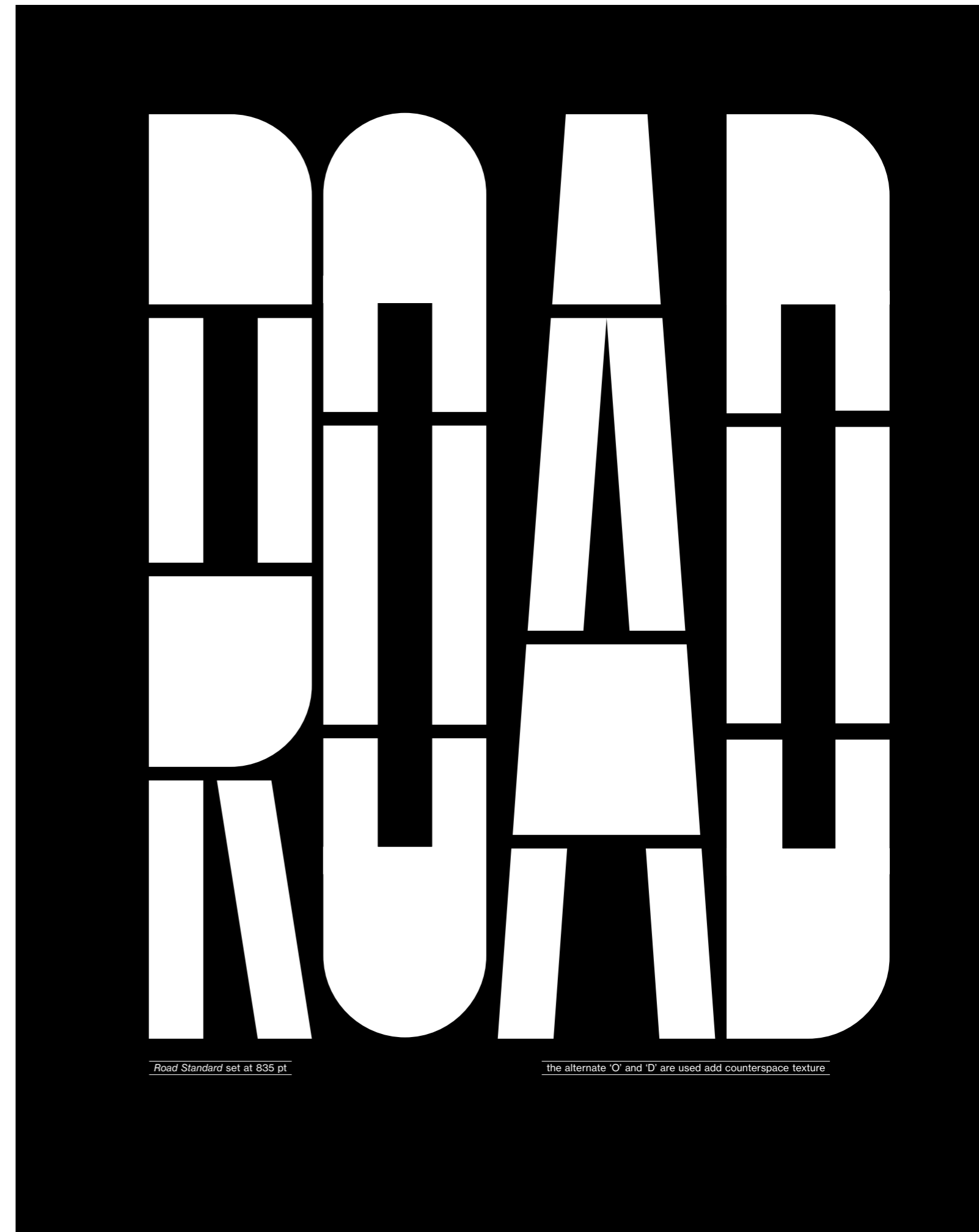
Road Standard set at 835 pt

the alternate 'O' and 'D' are used add counterspace texture

Road Standard has many alternate characters

use of the alternate 'D's adds a rhythmic texture to the counterspace

AABBCCDDEE
FFGGHHII
JJKKLLMM
NNOOPPQQRRSSTTZZ

some of *Road Standard's* alternate characters

ABC
ABC
ABC
ABC

DEF
GHI
JKL
MN
MN

the specimen sheets included size and speed details as specified in the *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD)

60
30MPH

OPQRSTUV
WV
WY
WAY
WAY

90
45MPH
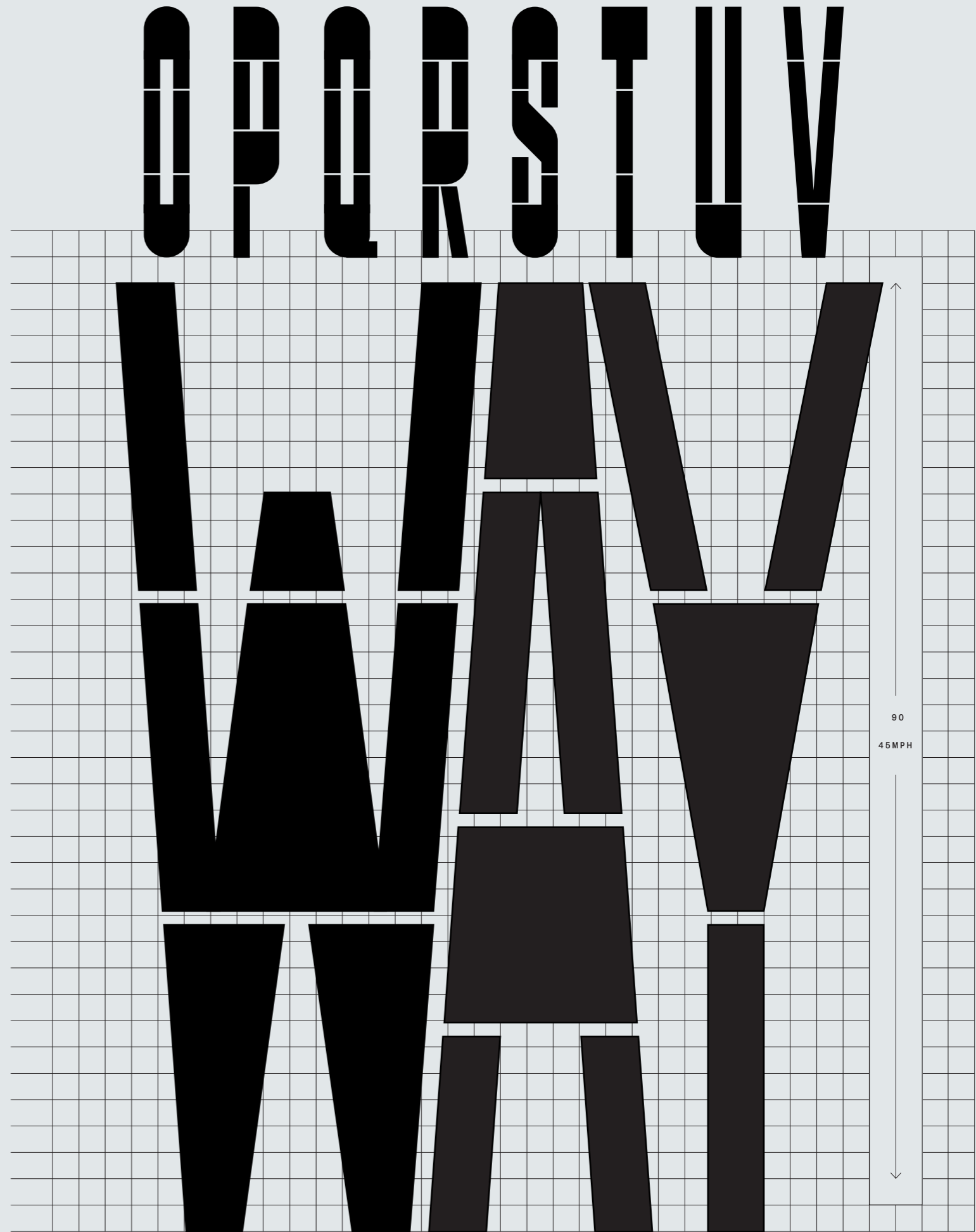
at ninety inches tall this type is legible at speeds up to forty-five miles per hour

150
75MPH
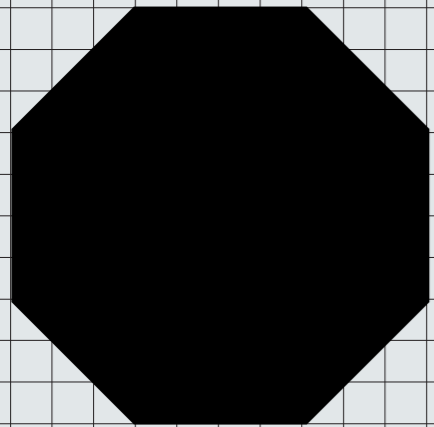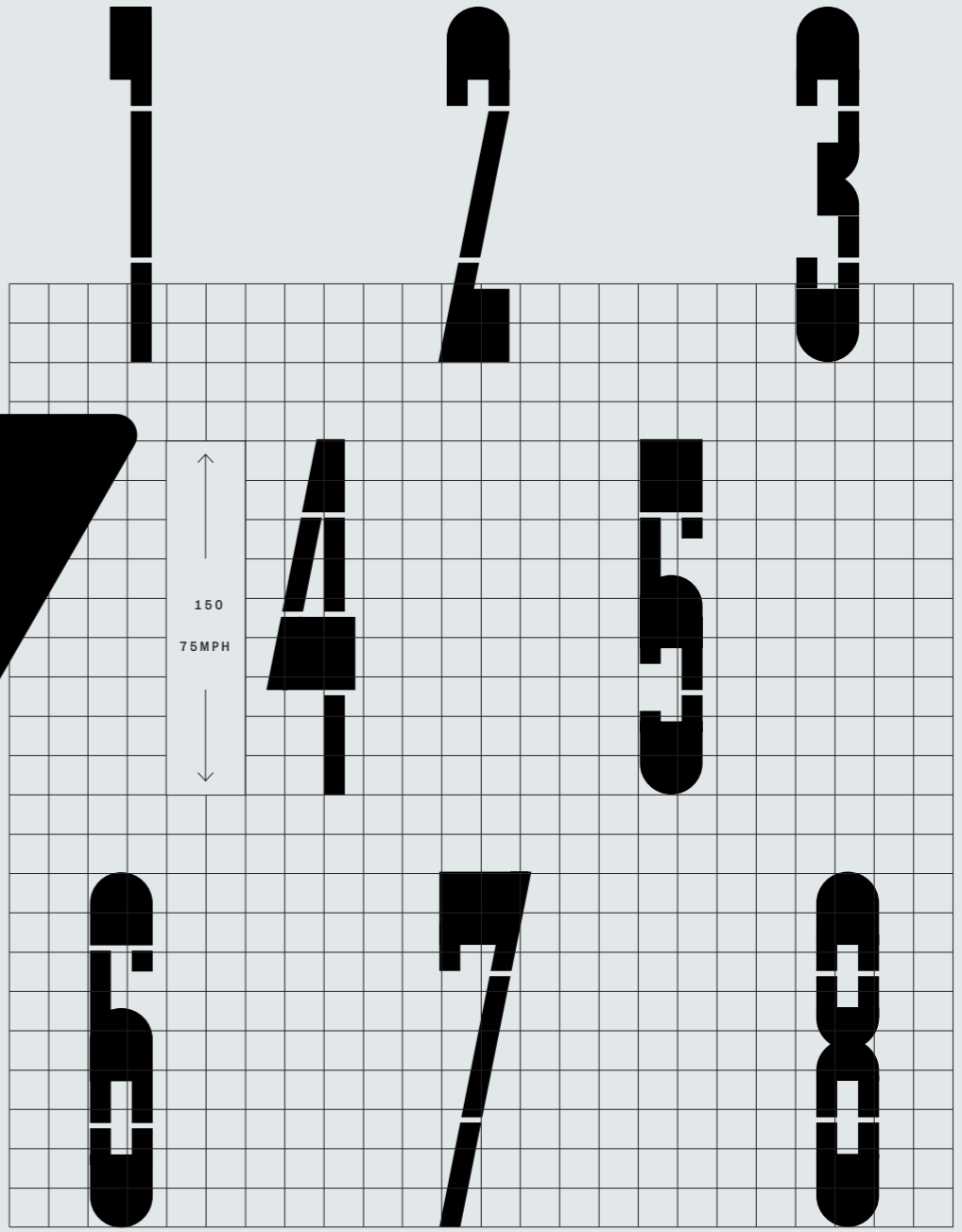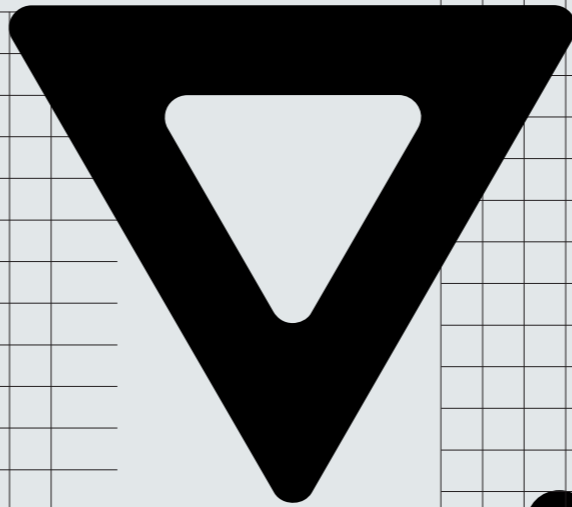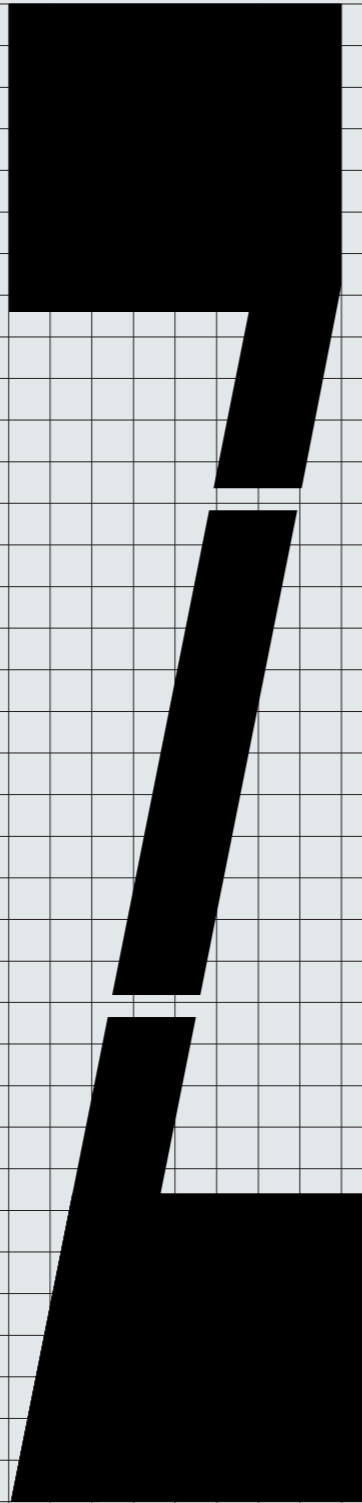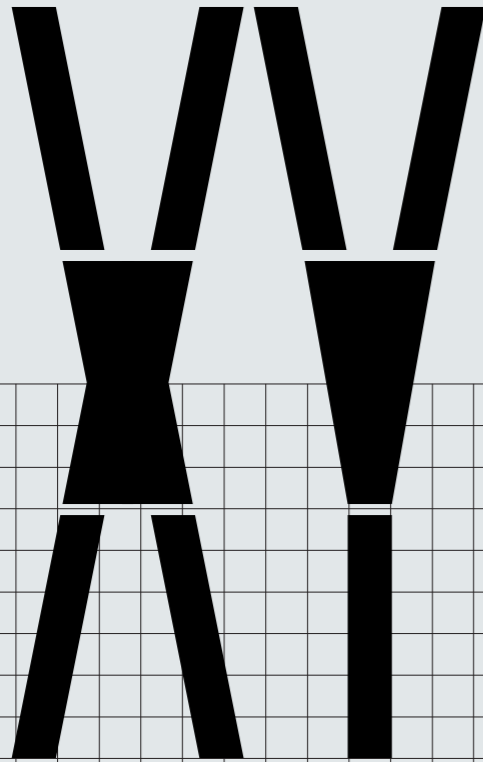
120
60MPH
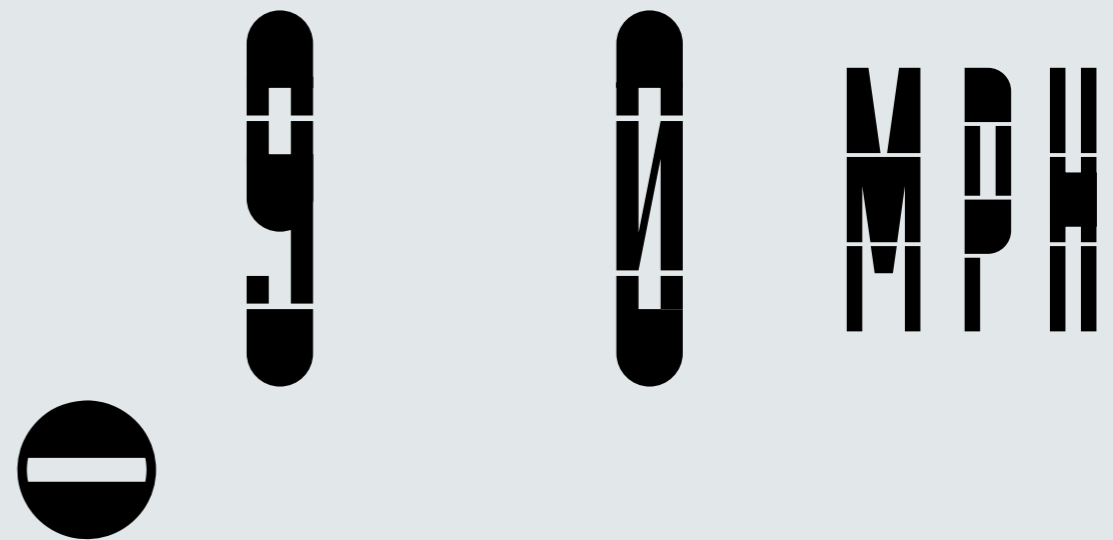
at 150 inches, (10,800 points) the type is legible at seventy-five miles per hour

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK SUPER VISION ROAD STANDARD

the specimen books included fold-out posters of *Road Standard* in display uses

the second poster explores how vernacular authoritative aesthetics can easily appear playful and imaginative

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

SUPER VISION   ROAD STANDARD

Fantasy, Reality, Interceptor

While working with an archive of photos I collected as part of a Chicago Police project, I noticed a grouping that stood out as incredibly problematic. This group contains images of Ford's aggressively art-directed and designed marketing graphics, which are used to entice police forces to purchase Ford *Interceptors*.

Using Illustrator's *image trace* function I maintained the images' content while quickly translating them into a *Bande Dessinée,* the Franco-Belgian comics style synonymous with the comic book aesthetic. Simplifying the photos allows the viewer of these images to focus less on the colors and backgrounds there by highlighting what ends up reading as an overly aggressive subject matter.

Perhaps we are designing our police to be more aggressive? Ford rebranded their *Crown Victoria* as the *Interceptor*, in 2012, to cater to the Police market as they wish to be seen. 2012 was the first year that we changed from the *Crown Victoria* to the Police *Interceptor*. We wanted a bold, aggressive style, said one Ohio officer, after his vehicle's graphics won a design competition, sponsored by the law enforcement publication company Hendon Media Group. It seems are even awarding this aggressiveness.

simplified graphic that demonstrates Ford's new aggressive tone

original image of Ford's Interceptor marketing work

having designed 50+ vehicle liveries in my past, this 'ICE' word-break looks very intentional

the study rendered a series of vignettes
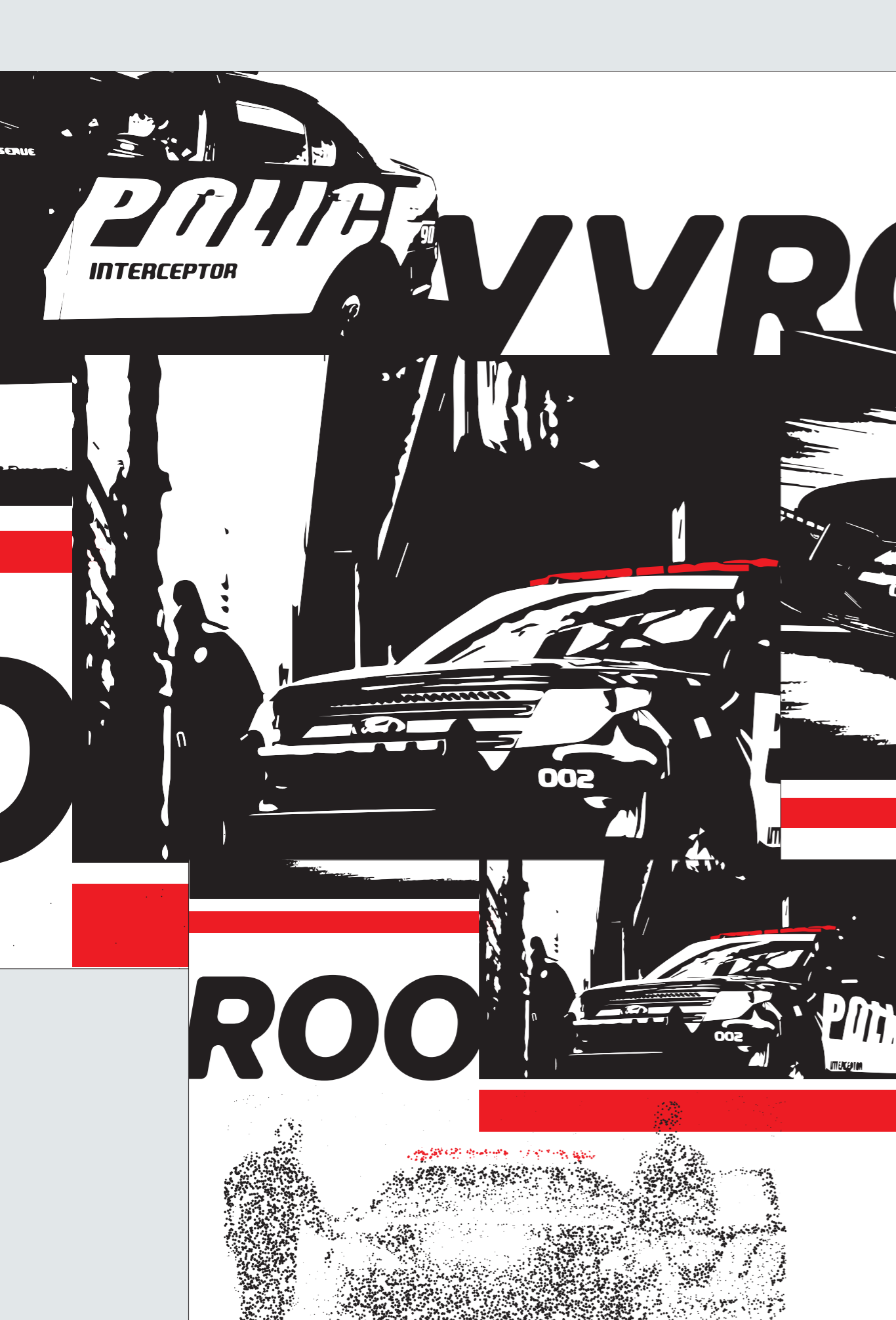
look at the dog … look at the word

the formate and style became a method of ocusing attention

90 × 128 cm weitformat poster composed of vignettes

The PRESENT contains nothing more than the PAST and what is found in the EFFECT was already in the CAUSE —HENRI BERGSON

Chicago Design Museum

this version of the poster was commissioned by the Chicago Design Museum for their exhibition *Great Ideas of Humanity*

Great Ideas of Humanity at the Chicago Design Museum

the exhibition opened on April 20, 2018

The Chicago Design Museum in consultation with design historian, Victor Margolin and modern master, John Massey expanded CCA's (Container Corporation of America's) *Great Ideas of Western Man*, re-imagining the stunning campaign, as, *Great Ideas of Humanity*.

Commissioned to design a poster responding to Henri Bergson's quote, the present contains nothing more than the past and what is found in the effect was already in the cause I felt the idea of aggressiveness begetting further aggressiveness could fit well.

New works were created for the re-imagined campaign by over 60 designers, including: the late Ivan Chermayeff, Paula Scher, Douglass Scott, Carol Ross Barney, Jilly Simons, Gail Anderson, Bart Crosby, James Goggin, Tanner Woodford, Cody Hudson, Reina Takahashi, myself, and many others.

in the same row, to the left of my poster, Ivan Chermayeff redesigned a poster he created decades earlier as part of the original campaign

A Bold Fight

It seems to me that the people least interested in working to reverse the effects of climate change are also those most likely to support defense-initiatives and war. For this project, I borrowed the aesthetic of war propaganda to suggest that perhaps war is what we need — a war against climate change, and a fight for our Earth.

Remembered well as the cover image of the *Whole Earth Catalog*, the first color photo of Earth is said to have brought silence to all viewers. This image is credited with helping to slow nuclear proliferation and catalyzing the environmental movement. Using this same image of the Earth, I have recolored it to visually reference the heat maps used widely in weather reports.

To get the lettering to feel like the right combination of Military and pop-culture Hollywood, I drew nearly 50 stylistic variations, and then created a custom typeface. Often, when designing letters, I have to design the letters that will not be used to ensure that the letters that will be are indeed 'truthful' to their 'universe.'

The 'HT' ligature felt poster-like in how it looks tooled, crafted, and intentional. This kind of dramatic connection inspired a series of two- and three-character ligatured glyphs.

600 pt *Bold Fight* set in upper and lower case

the Earth visualized based on changing weather

FIGHT
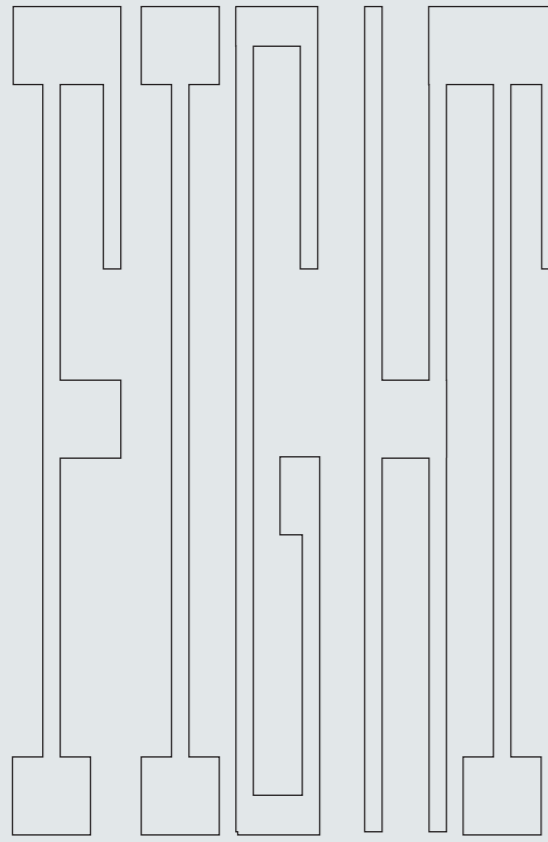
these Wild West, reverse-contrast letters looked too Nintendo

FIGHT
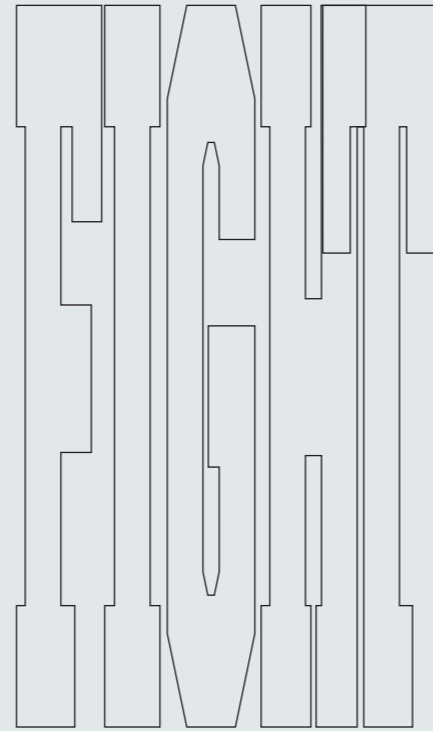
removing the left serif of the T was helpful

FIGHT

still too much of an 8-bit digital feel

FIGHT
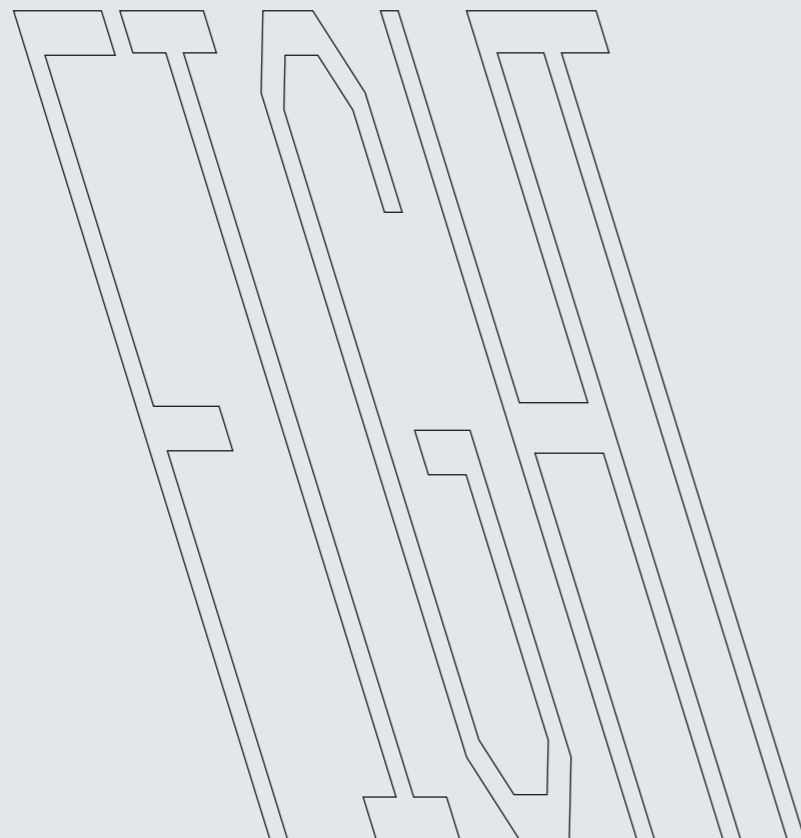
reverse slant & contrast for reversing climate change—not working

While I do not include the process
for most projects in this book,
my process involves feverish iterative
sketching of letters and layout.
This is a small collection of lettering
drawn for the poster that lead
to the creation of a robust typeface.

FIGHT

trying it without the reverse slant … still isn't working

FIGHT

these were all simply failing

FIGHT
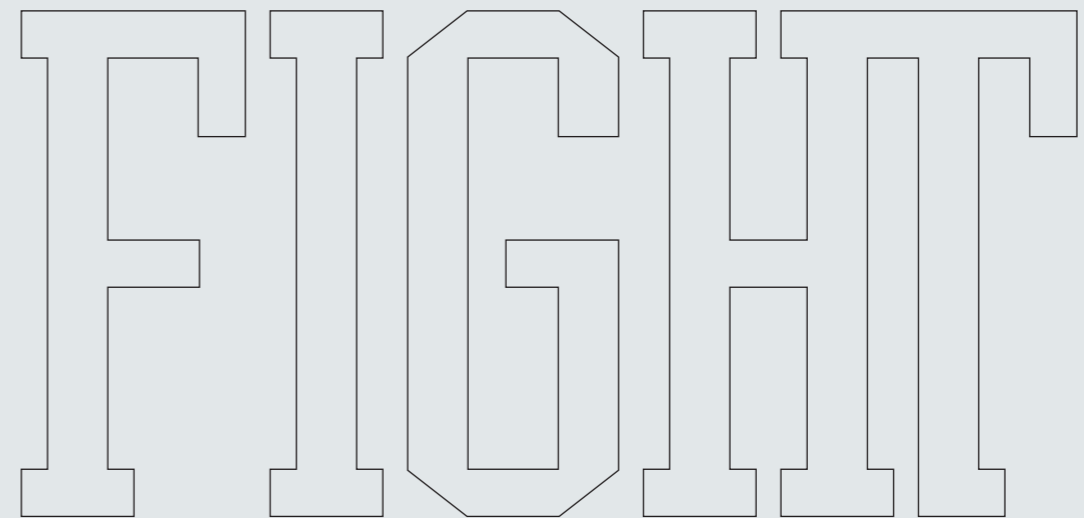
after abandoning the reverse contrast … low contrast was failing too

FIGHT

increasing the drama throughout the letterforms felt successful

2×

5×

7×
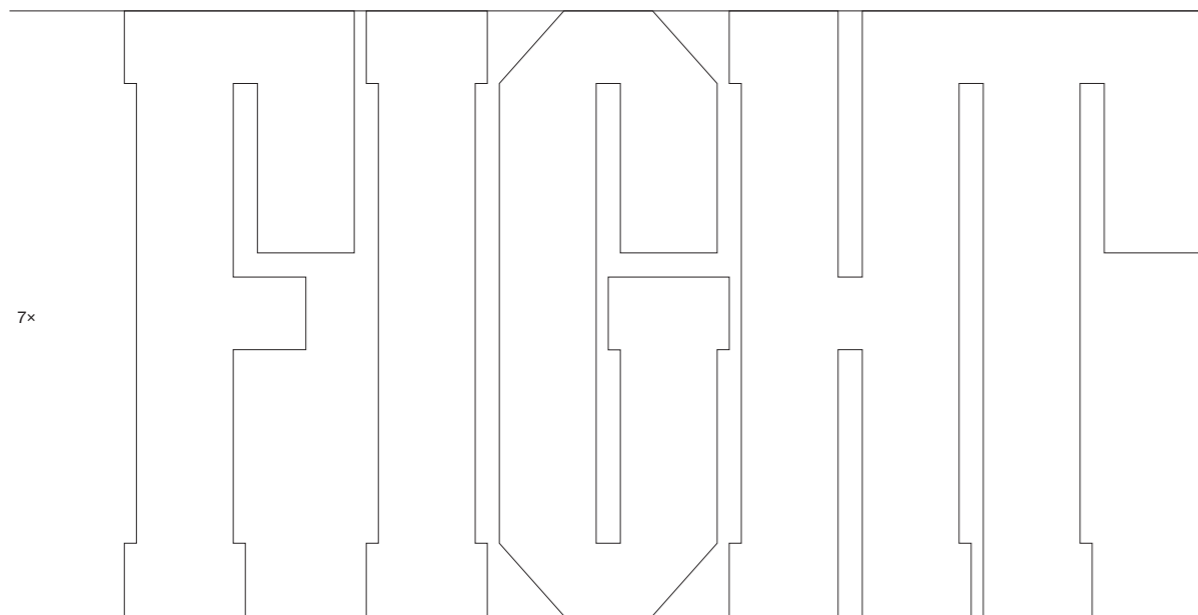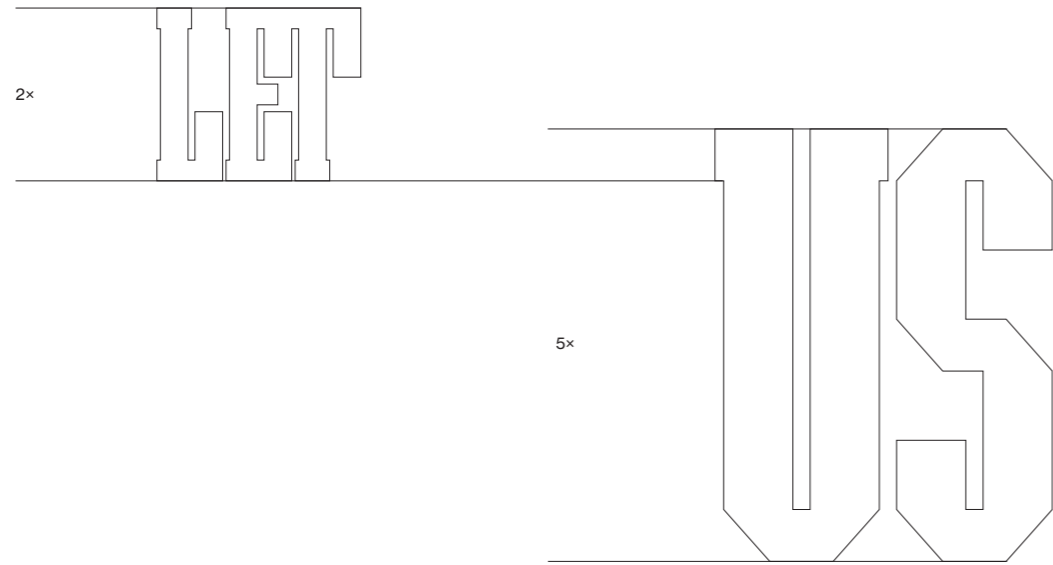
in scaling the type across the three lines, a Fibonacci sequence was used to create both harmony and impact
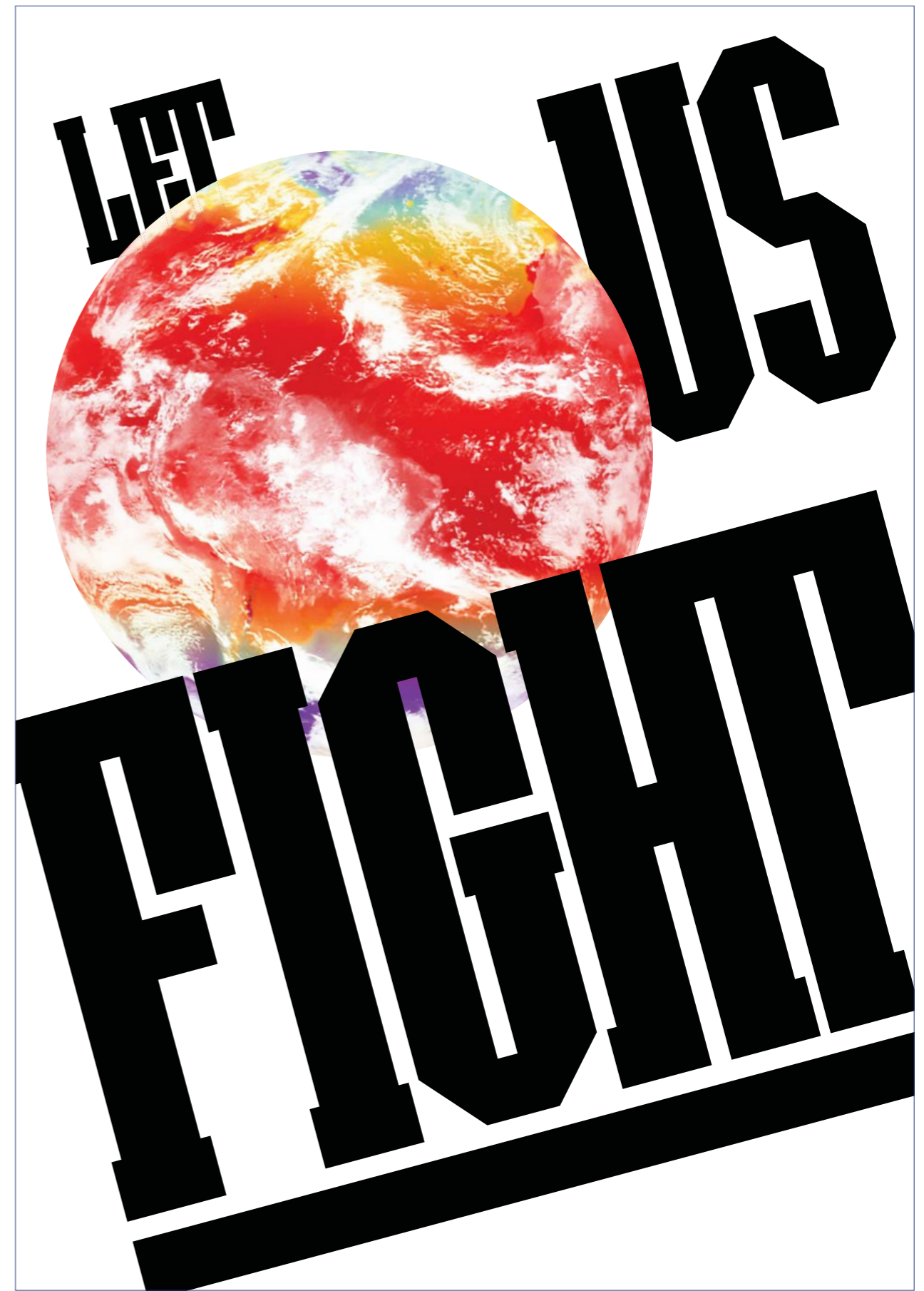
final poster 90 × 128 cm

unsure of what would work for the poster, lowercase letterforms were drawn

1500 pt *Bold Fight* set in lowercase with Open Type discretionary ligatures turned on

POST

some of the lower-case ligatures

three character ligatures

POST TRUST

385 pt *Bold Fight* set in uppercase with ligature

TRUTH

215 pt *Bold Fight* set with three character ligature

POSTTRAUMA-TIC STRESS

ET HT IT NT ST TH TR Ti

a selection of upper-case ligatures

155 pt *Bold Fight* with negative leading

Bold Fight has a double 'T' ligature intended for word breaks

AaBbCcDdEeFf
GgHhIiJjKk
LlMmNnOoPpQq
RrSsTtUuVv
WwXxYyandEZ

1234567890%
+ $ – ¢ ± £ = € × ¥ ÷
½ ⅓ ⅔ ¼ ¾ ⅕
⅖ ⅗ ⅙ ⅚ ⅛ ⅜
⅝ ⅞ 2⁄9 4⁄9 5⁄9 8⁄9

DIS — ORDER!

IT'S ONLY 4°

CRISIS!

PARIS?

(39.2°F)

.¡!¿?,.:;(){}[]"”

#°/@©®¶$\

A Police Proposal

Graphic design will not solve Police related problems, but its role should be looked at critically. Across one week in the summer of 2017, I partnered with an Officer of the Chicago Police Department (CPD) in submitting graphics for squad cars on behalf of a *request for proposals*. I was interested as I was alarmed — might Chicago follow other police departments with a trendy aggressive look? I asked an officer I knew if they'd be interested in talking to inform a proposal that his station could consider presenting. Rather than talking about design and graphics, I spoke with him on life as an officer and his point-of-view on the relationship of the Public and the Police.

Our talks informed a design system and proposal: ten pages of urgent aesthetic design, with forty pages of front matter research creating a story of North America's aggressive aesthetics and the Public's pre-escalated tension of officers as warriors. His station focuses on de-escalation tactics and they were on-board.

The proposal was denied by the Superintendent, but, designing the car was not my goal. My intent was to exert influence via design, to shift the think-ing of the person who determines whether the Police force will follow Ford's gestapo-like gesture.

PUBLIC POLICE

this is the cover of the proposal at actual size
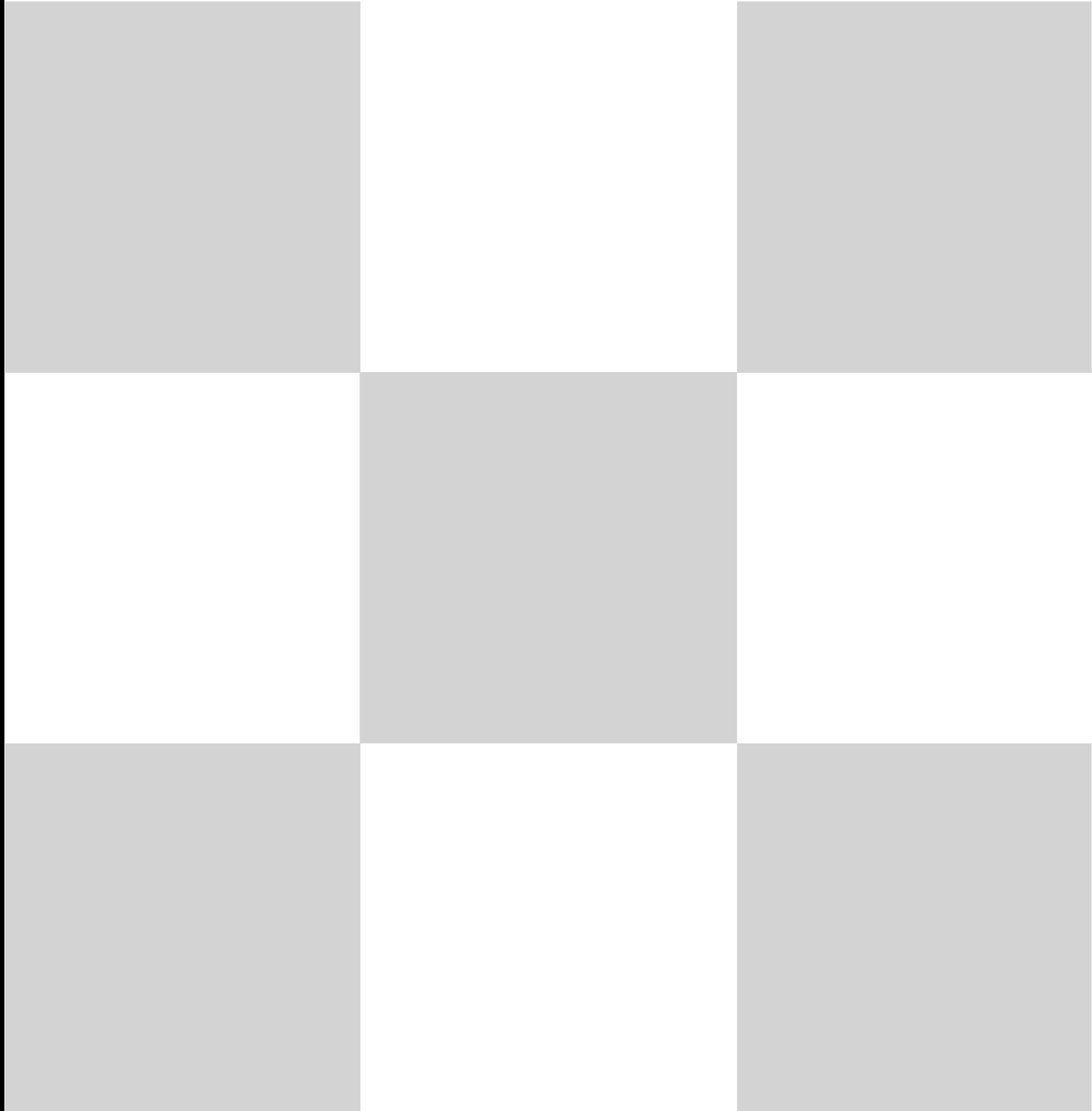
Serve + Protect examines the visual presence of America's P O L I C E [2] by focusing on [1]

their most ubiquitous asset, the squad car. The research and proposed identity published

here were developed in response to a June 2017, Request For Proposals (RFP) from Eddie

Johnson, Superintendent of the Chicago P O L I C E Department (CPD). While the work

was created by focusing on issues facing Chicago's P O L I C E force and its residents,

the principles and ideas expressed here are intended to help advance the dialog concerning

all P O L I C E Departments and their relationship with the publics they serve. [3]

[1] This title references the 'We Serve and Protect'
    slogan found on P O L I C E squad cars.
[2] Throughout this publication, the term P O L I C E
    will be intentionally set in a style that mimics how
    it appears in our public realm—in all-caps.
[3] This page alone starts to demonstrate the otherness
    in which we treat and perceive this word.

the foot notes speak to the design manuevors' purpose
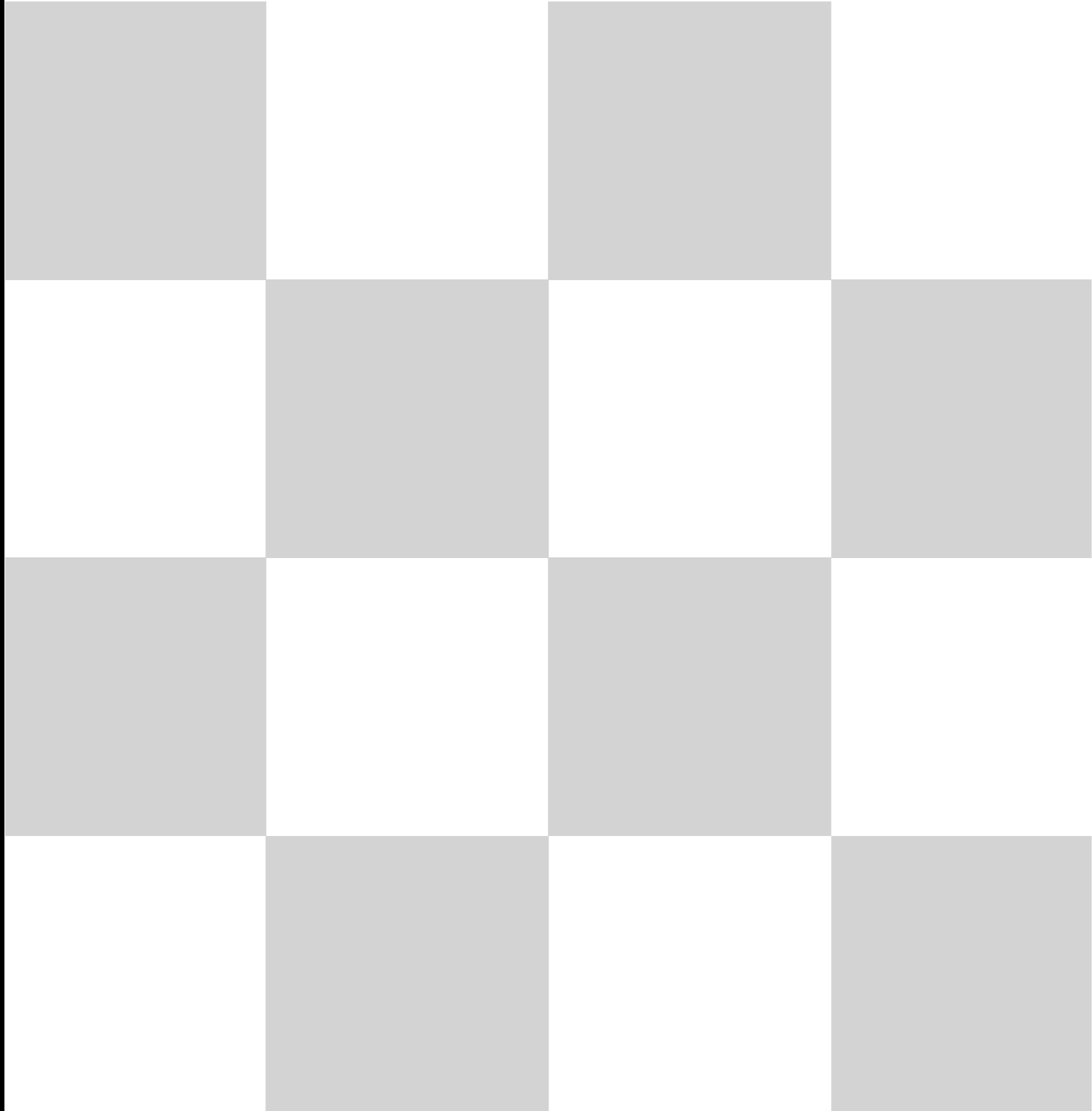
This work takes most seriously the complexity of issues between the   P O L I C E   and

the public. In no manner does this body of work, nor its creators believe that graphic design

can solve these issues alone. The identity of the   P O L I C E   like that of all entities is

complex, informed by actions, context, words, and appearance. Based upon their style and

aesthetic, graphic forms are capable of carrying both tone and meaning; at the same time,

meaning is projected upon these forms, based upon historic and current context. These

factors define any identity and must be considered when beginning a design project. [6]

[6]   The proposed identity in this publication considers
       both the formal and contextual meaning based on
       historic and current times.

the underline references the Police's use of the phrase thin blue line that suggest what separates them from the public

POLICE

Public +

This Cop Oversaw The Torture Of More Than 100 Black Men. Now He's Out After Less Than 4 Years In Jail.

Chicago Releases Video of Laquan McDonald Shooting

Chicago police chief fired amid Laquan McDonald fallout

Cop in Laquan McDonald video tied to another police shooting death

Chicago Releases Videos From Police Officers' Killing of 16-Year-Old

Chicago Police Department Warns of Gangs' Threats to Attack Officers

Off-duty officer fatally shoots unarmed man in NW Side confrontation: Cops

Chicago police rolling out new, mandatory 'de-escalation' training

Chicago police adopt de-escalation in sweeping change to use-of-force policy

FORCE

Trust · Force

Aesthetic of Chicago Squad Car   33

To understand what may be appropriate in establishing a new look (or tone) of a squad car, the design approach must work to understand the presence of the P O L I C E and their relationship with the public they serve. This can happen by looking at recent and historic P O L I C E related events, locally and nationally. The graphic style of the squad car holds a direct connection to the P O L I C E related events of the 70's, 80's, 90's, 00's, and 10's. These are the graphics of the Chicago's *Midnight Crew*, the officers that tortured 100's of innocent citizens in the 1980's, they are the graphics that brought 7,185 people to the Homan Blacksite.

10 From 1972 to '91 P O L I C E Commander Jon Burge was in charge of a brutal group of rogue detectives called the Midnight Crew, known for their torture of suspects.
11 May of 2017, the Chicago Torture Justice Center opened it's doors to assist individuals and communities heal from P O L I C E violence.
12 A 2015 Guardian lawsuit exposed the CPD active blacksite that had tortured and detained 7,185 without any records of who was detained.

Ford Interceptor, 2017 Photo: Chicago Tribune

Chevy Impala, 1977 Photo: SJC.Utah.gov

Trust · Force

Aesthetic of Chicago Squad Car   35

Ford Interceptor, 2013 Photo: Scott Dixon

Ford Crown Victoria, mid-2000's Photo: Scott Dixon

Dodge Monaco, 1975 Photo: Blues Brothers

Minivan, mid-2000's Photo: William Widmer

Ford Crown Victoria, mid-2000's Photo: CBS

Forensic Vehicles, 2000s Photo: Scott Dixon

Ford Crown Victoria, 1988 Photo: Scott Dixon

Ford Interceptor, 2013 Photo: Body Camera

Trust · Force

America's Aesthetic of Authority   37

Looking at the graphics of every P O L I C E vehicle in the United States, it seems that America is following a tradition of aggressive aesthetics for authority. The design of nearly every American P O L I C E vehicle has taken a similar approach to the graphics. The experience, feelings, and reaction the public has to the presence of a P O L I C E squad car is not solely based on that specific moment, but on every other moment they've seen a P O L I C E vehicle. Chicago P O L I C E not only carry the last 60 years of baggage from their graphics, but of almost every American P O L I C E car. This similarity creates unconscious and implicit bias, pre-escalating situations with the P O L I C E.

13 P O L I C E officers are often trained on biases, but bias is not limited to P O L I C E. Biases are a widespread problem that arises from experience, history, and culture.

Irving, Texas Photo: CityOfIrving.com

South Jordan, Salt Lake City PHOTO: SJC.Utah.gov

Trust · Force

America's Aesthetic of Authority   39

University of Illinois Photo: Wikimedia Commons

Durham, North Carolina Photo: ChapelBoro.com

Waterford, Michigan Photo: Ford.com/Interceptor

Pittsburgh Pennsylvania Photo: Wiki Commons

Henderson, Kentucky Photo: SignDesign120.com

Eagleville, Tennessee Photo: Ford.com/Interceptor

Nassau, New York Photo: Ford.com/Interceptor

Gloucester, New Jersey Photo: GTPolice.com

Trust · Force

Default of Authority   41

While there are differences across the P O L I C E cars, these articulations are part of the same visual language. Literally describing a series of P O L I C E cars can further demonstrate the commonalities of the cars' graphics. Striping bands of color span across the side of the car, violated by bold, all-caps, heavy, italic, and skewed, type set as-large-as-possible. Why is it that P O L I C E cars today look so similar? For the most part, they come from the same place, a series of pre-made templates, shared globally across vinyl shops. The core consideration across these graphics seems to be a dangerous one; does this look P O L I C E enough?

14 Graphic Designs International Inc, Grafix Shoppe, and Vinyl Graphics Police Division are the leading vinyl shops supplying P O L I C E departments.

CSD-1051 Mock-up: Vinyl Graphics Police Division

CSD-1045 Mock-up: Vinyl Graphics Police Division

CSD-1085 Mock-up: Vinyl Graphics Police Division

CSD-1044 Mock-up: Vinyl Graphics Police Division

CSD-1074 Mock-up: Vinyl Graphics Police Division

CSD-1085 Mock-up: Vinyl Graphics Police Division

Arresting   Photo: 2017 Ford Interceptor Brochure

Most Fuel-Efficient Law Enforcement Car   Photo: masomaGroup.com

Is this starting to look P O L I C E enough? The graphics + photoshoots shown here are

designed by Ford as a marketing effort to sell more P O L I C E cars. What might it mean

for Ford to retire the previous P O L I C E model (Crown Victoria), to introduce a new

model, the P O L I C E Interceptor? Ford's strategy is to illustrate the P O L I C E

as Ford believes the P O L I C E want to be seen. Could it be that graphic design, style,

and aesthetics is influencing + permitting P O L I C E to be further empowered to act in

aggressive manners? "2012 was the first year that our Department changed from the Crown

Victoria to the P O L I C E Interceptor. We wanted a bold, aggressive style." [15]

15   Excerpt from a Willoughby, Ohio P O L I C E officer
      responding to their vehicle graphics winning a design
      competition hosted by the Law Enforcement Publications
      and Conferences company, Hendon Media Group.

As the P O L I C E car moves throughout the city, the bold + aggressive graphics look

familiar. While it is often accepted that words set in all-caps is read as yelling, the all-caps

letters and aggressive aesthetic of the P O L I C E car seen moving in physical space

equate graphically to that of *Breaking News*. In an time when *Breaking News* is constant and

further complicated by the idea of *Fake News*, what might it mean for P O L I C E to

share the same visual vocabulary? As the aggressive aesthetics of authority also live in video

[16]
games where players can be P O L I C E officers massacring the public, it seems the

notion of looking authoritative is losing it's legitimacy.

[16]   The 2013 release of Grand Theft Auto 5, gave users the
         ability to customize the generic P O L I C E vehicles
         to look identical to any P O L I C E department.

Stock Broadcast Graphics Title Animation Photo: Shutterstock.com

Grand Theft Auto 5 Streamed live on Jan 8, 2017   Photo: Acepilot2k7 on YouTube.com

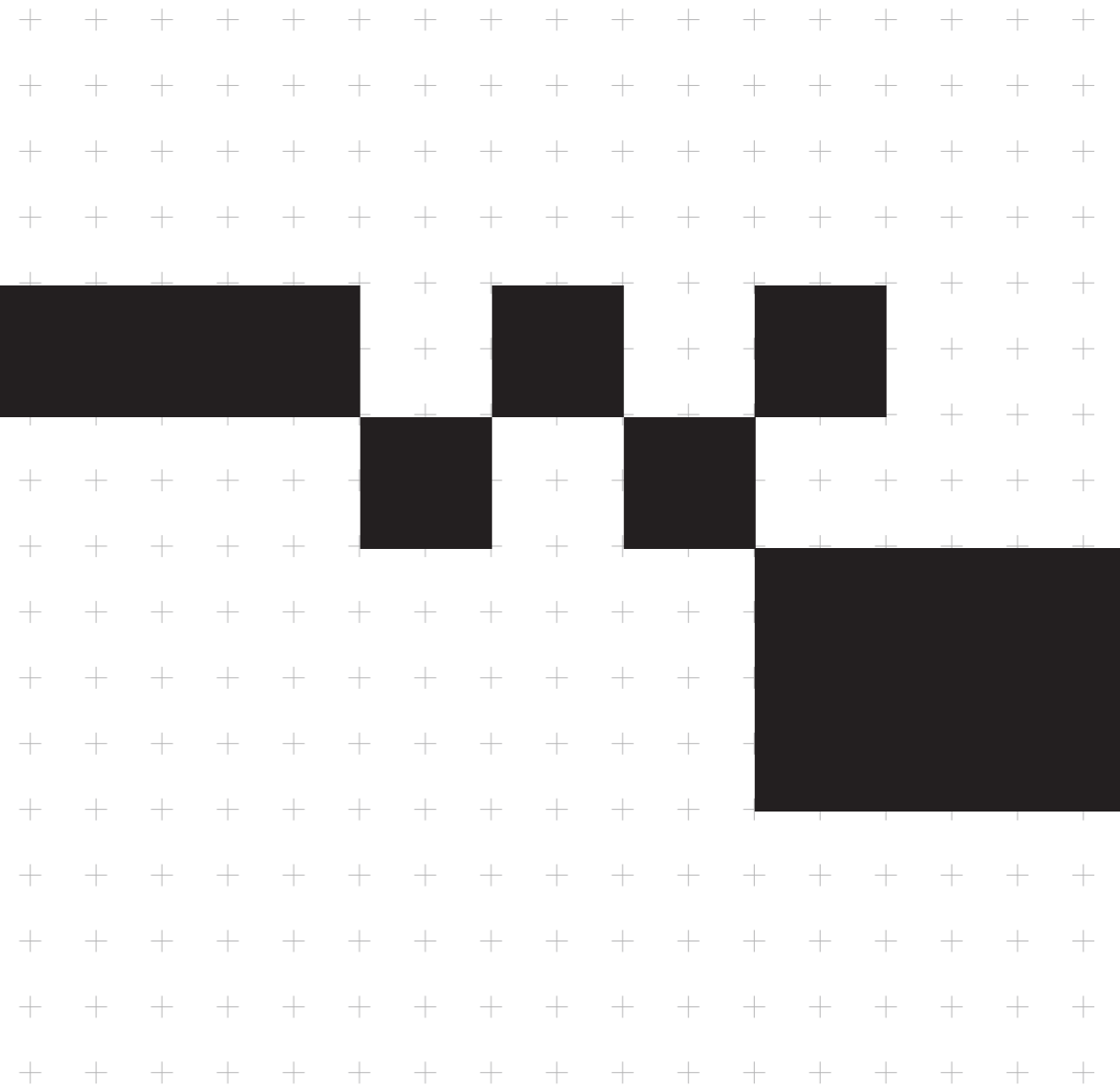where else do we see these aggressive aesthetics?

Embracing Heritage

Based on the diced bands of heraldic forms and the Scottish regiment of the British Army, Police began adopting the pattern.
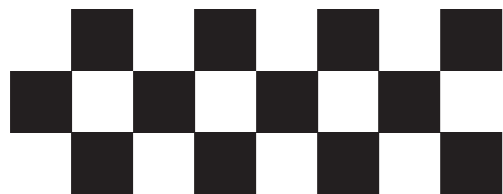
City of Glasgow Police have been using the tartan since 1932.

At times the dicing redesigned and skewed to bring greater visual activation to it.

A Chicago Police Tradition

The distinctive chequered pattern known as dicing is used on Police caps and flags.

The dicing band is on service caps, winter knit caps, baseball-style caps, the campaign hats, and horse bridles of mounted units.

Dicing is often used as signage, and architectural detail on newer police stations.

the foundation of 'dicing' leads towards a proposal of a more 'urgent' than 'aggressive' visual tone

the proposal demonstrates the mechanics and potential for growth based on the dicing

The additional colors
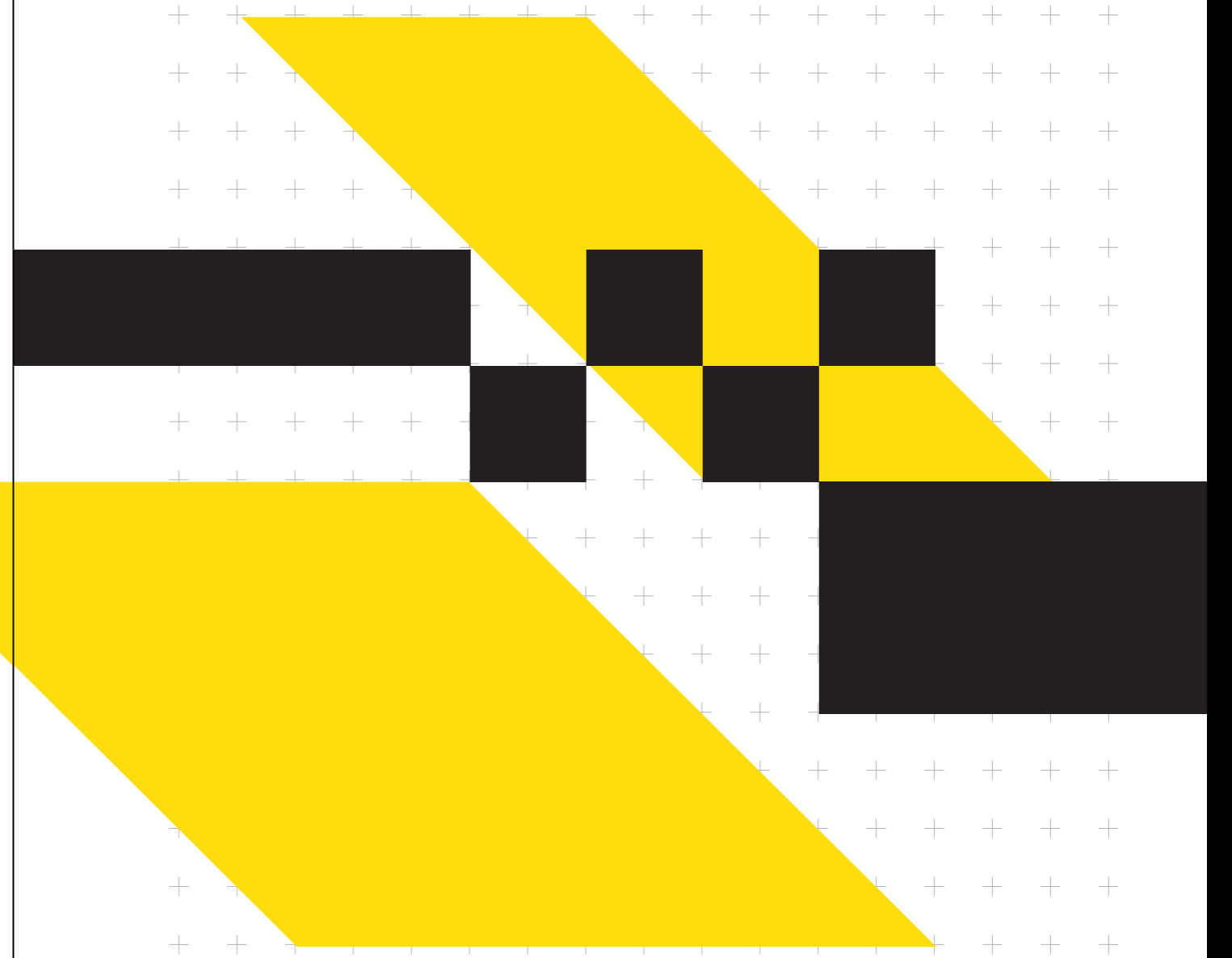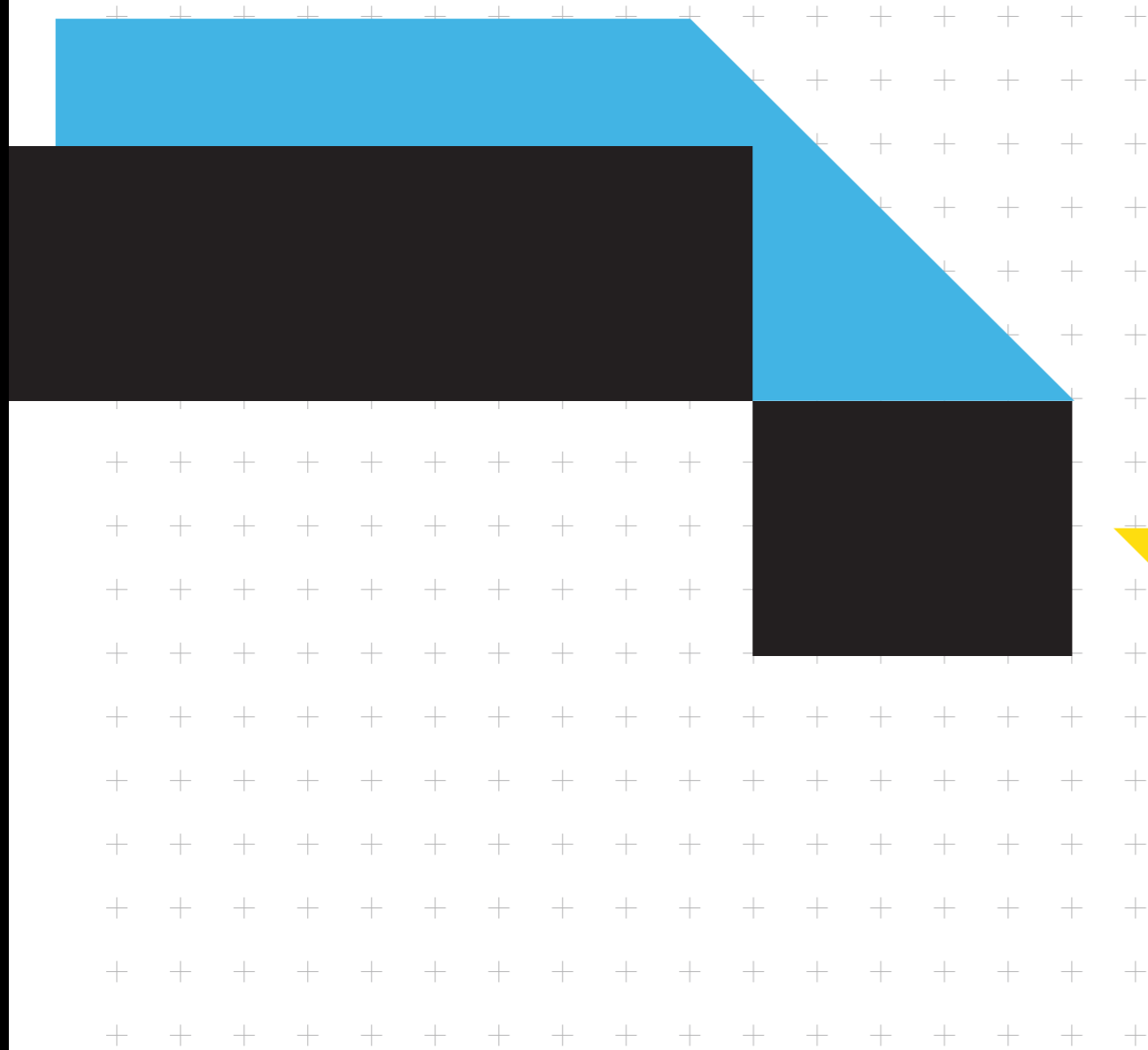
... to a pattern that feels more about movement and integration rather than that of a barrier

Dicing Demonstrating Movement

Passenger side door

Driver side door

Aligning the Chicago flag stars with the door handle
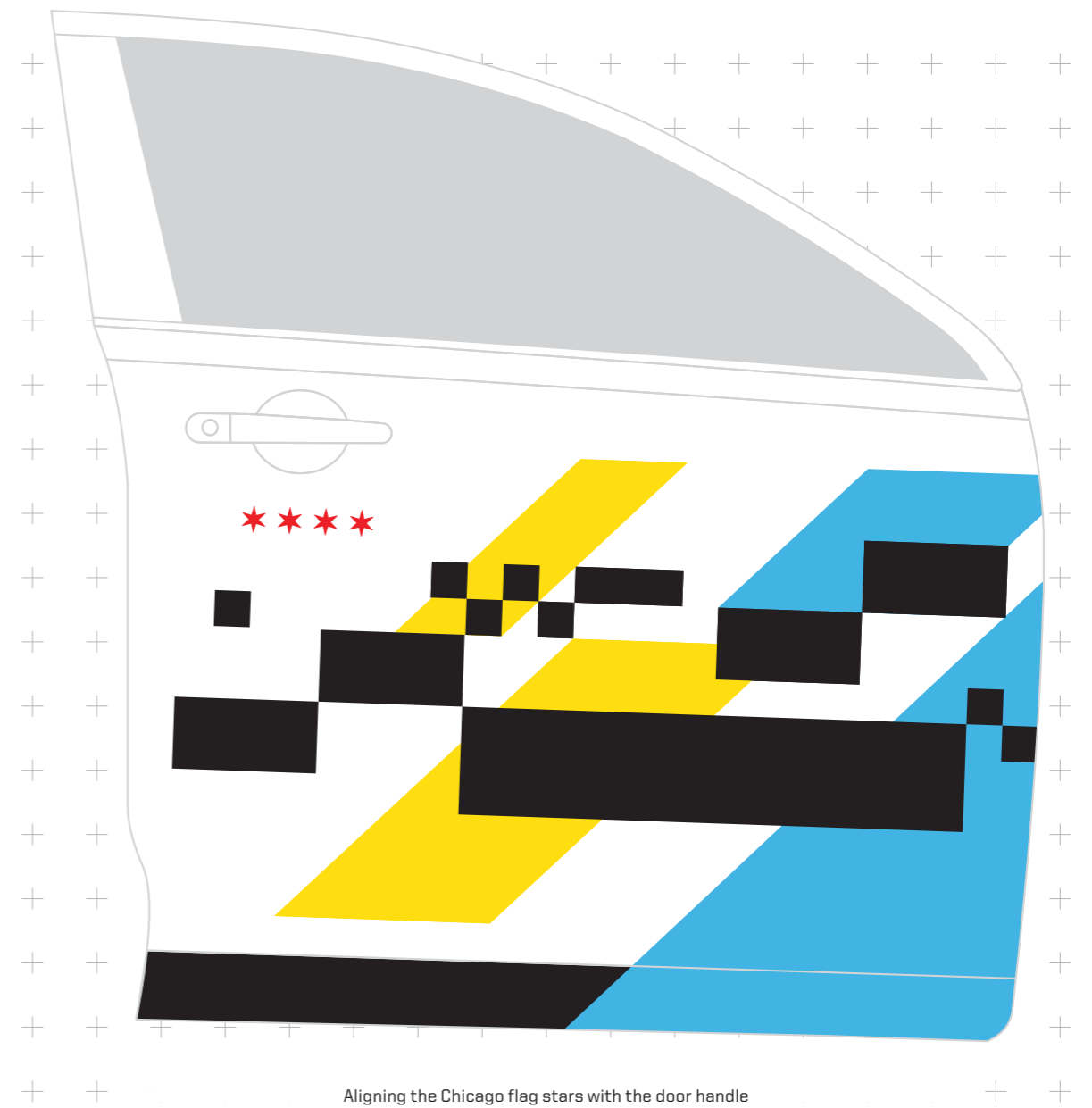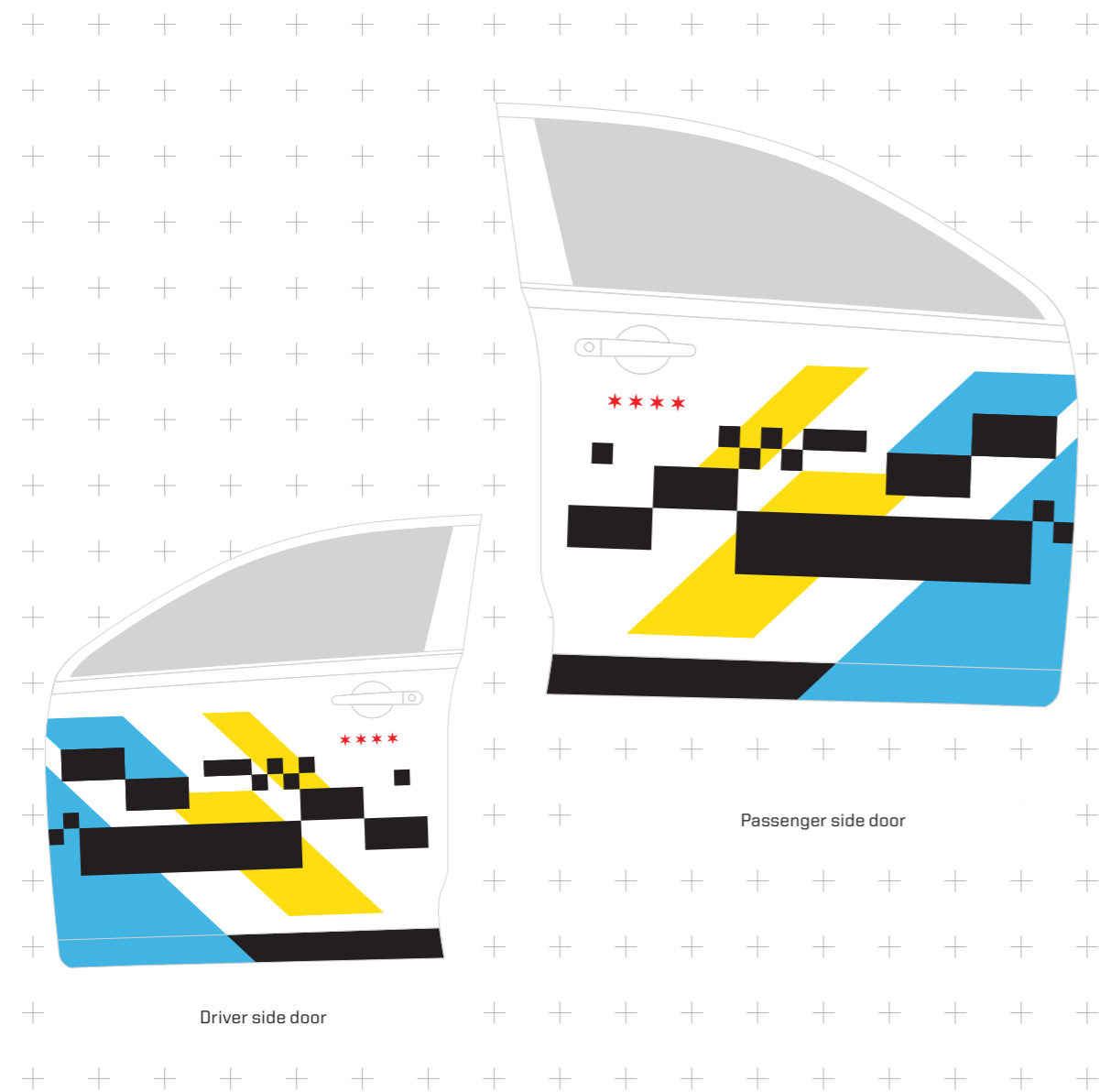
Going Beyond Yelling

POLICE

The most used typeface on Police vehicles is *Eurostile Bold Extended*

POLICE

POLICE

A skewed version of *Impact* is used and sold by Ford

Impact is used by most

POLICE

Universer Extra Black is used and sold by Ford

POLICE

Rockwell Extra Bold is used by the *NYPD*

POLICE

NYPD also uses a skewed version of *Rockwell Extra Bold*, this is also found on other department vehicles

POLICE

Arial Black is used by the *Toronto Police* and on Police vehicles in several video games
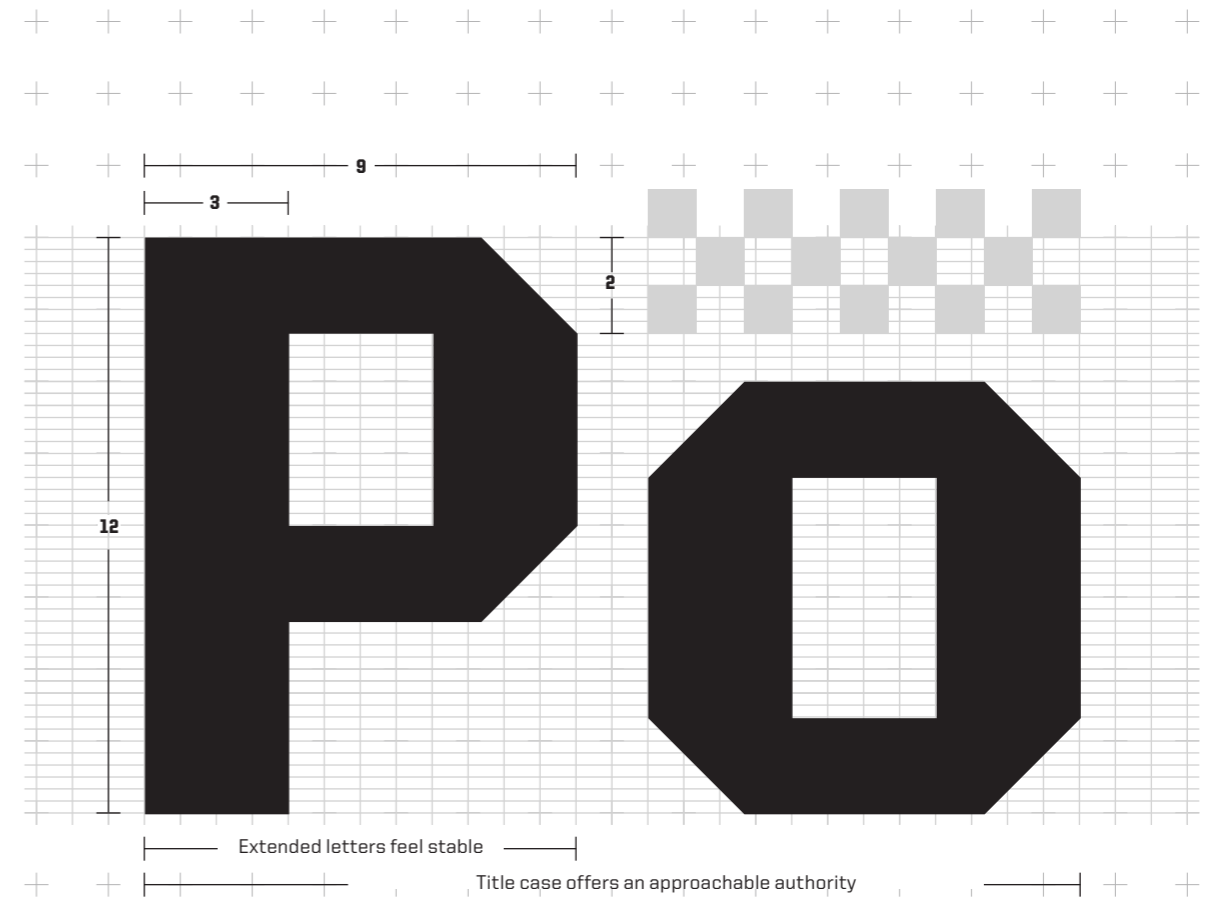
Police   ?

Very few police departments set type in Title Case

even the small adjustment of setting 'Police' in title case could be an improvement

A System that Connects each Element

The geometric simplicity the patch and our flag relate to dicing.

The shapes, angles, and weights of the dicing, the patch, and the flag can inform custom type.

Extended letters feel stable

Title case offers an approachable authority

the dicing pattern can also inform a typeface that relates to the patches on the uniform

POLICE
POLICE
POLICE
POLICE
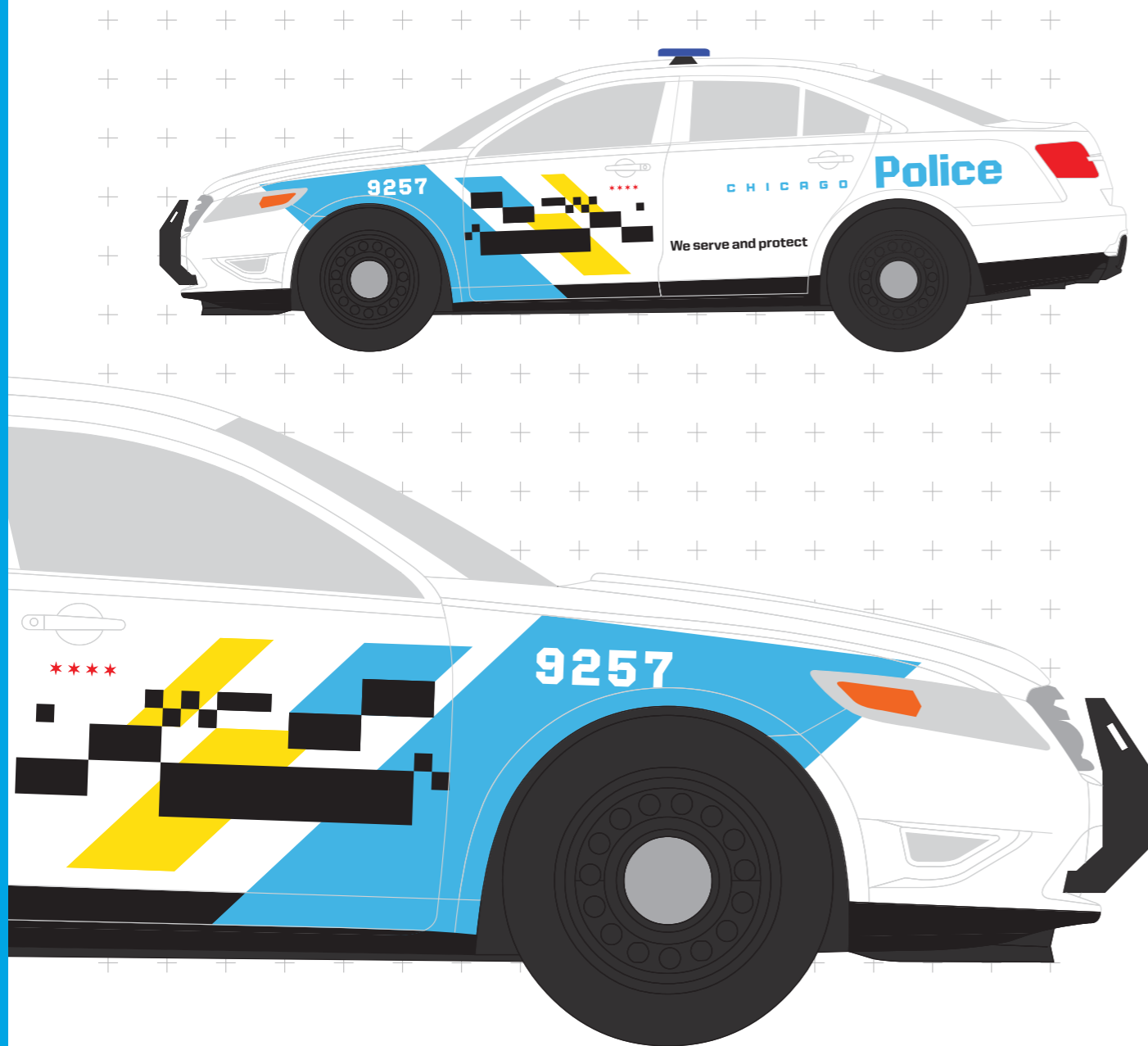*POLICE*
POLICE
POLICE
Police

C H I C A G O

Police

Chicago Police

C H I C A G O

Police

A System that Connects each Element

312

C H I

606

the type is built with smallcaps and numerals

the final section demonstrates the system in use   placement of graphics also considered installation in terms of labor
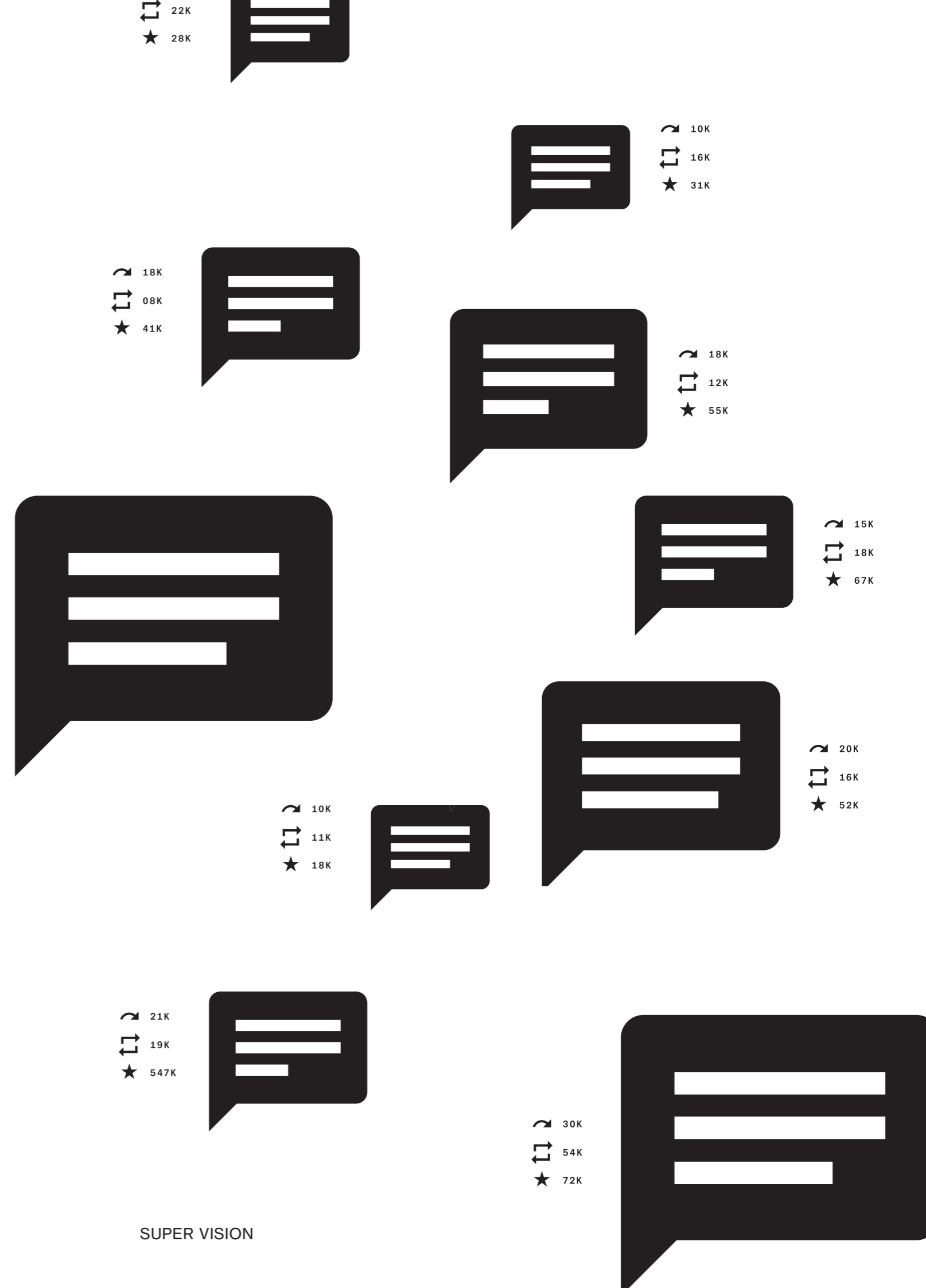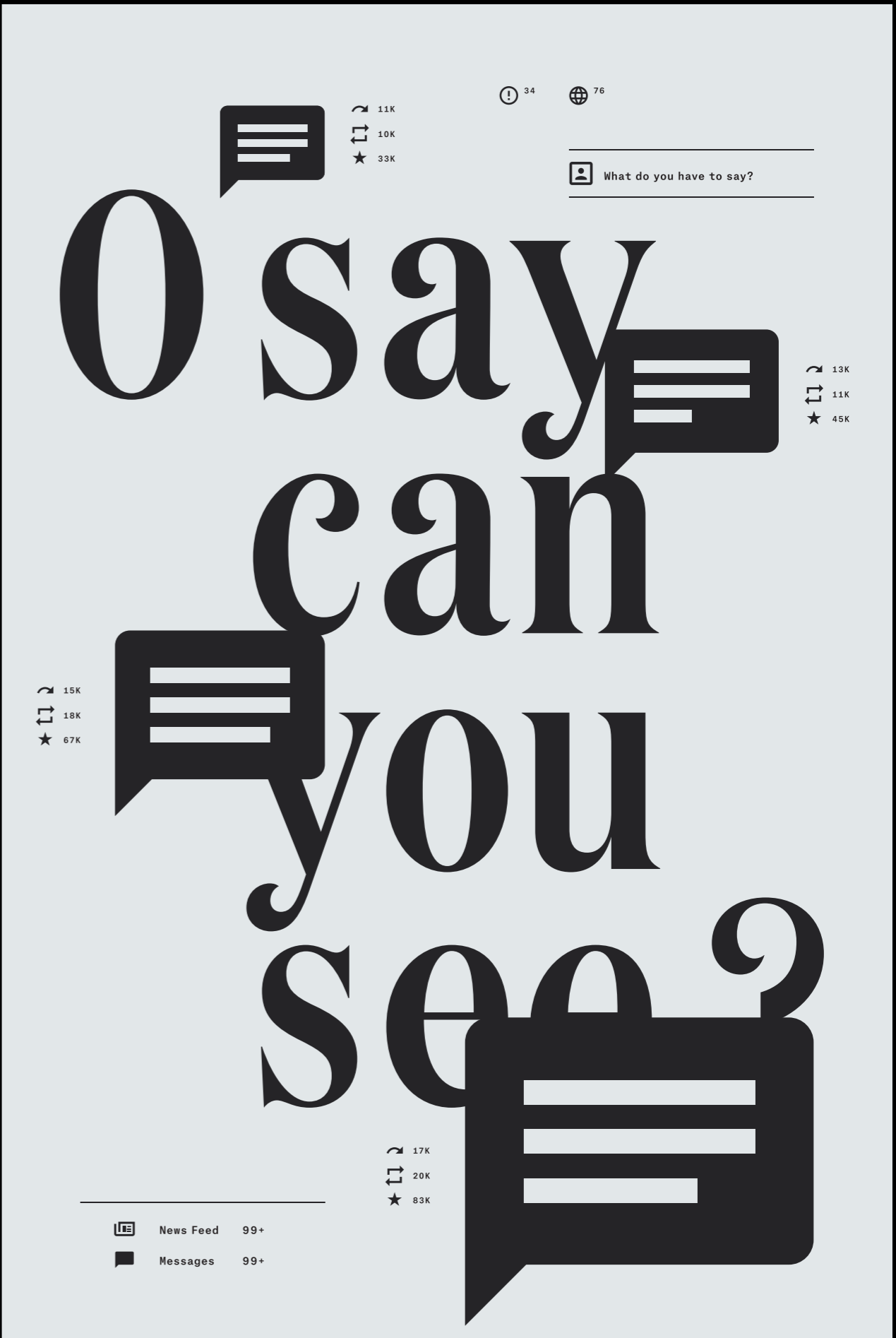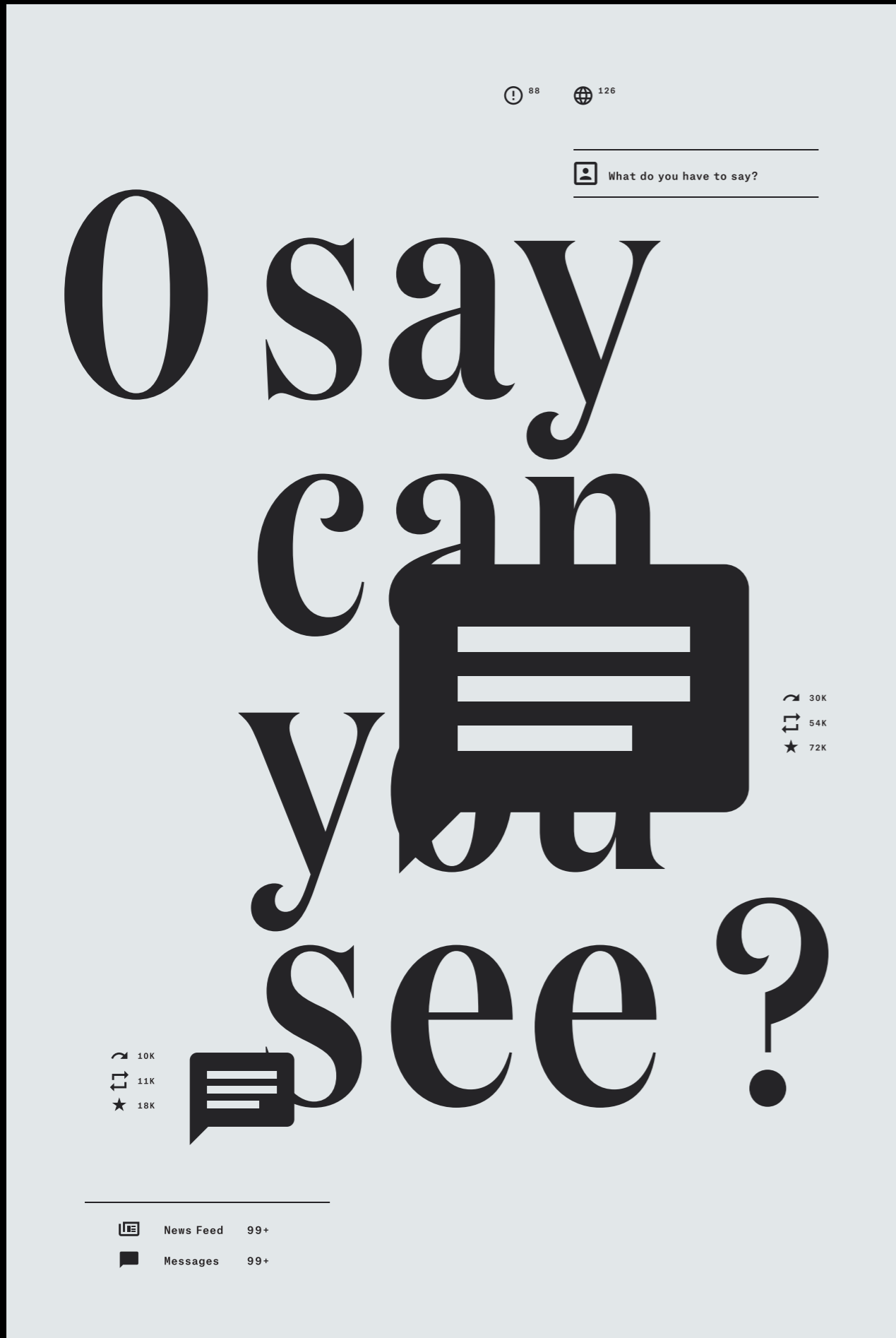
What are We Saying

What are We Saying is a poster series
that questions the state of our communications
through the contrast of traditional forms
with contemporary culture's symbolic codes.
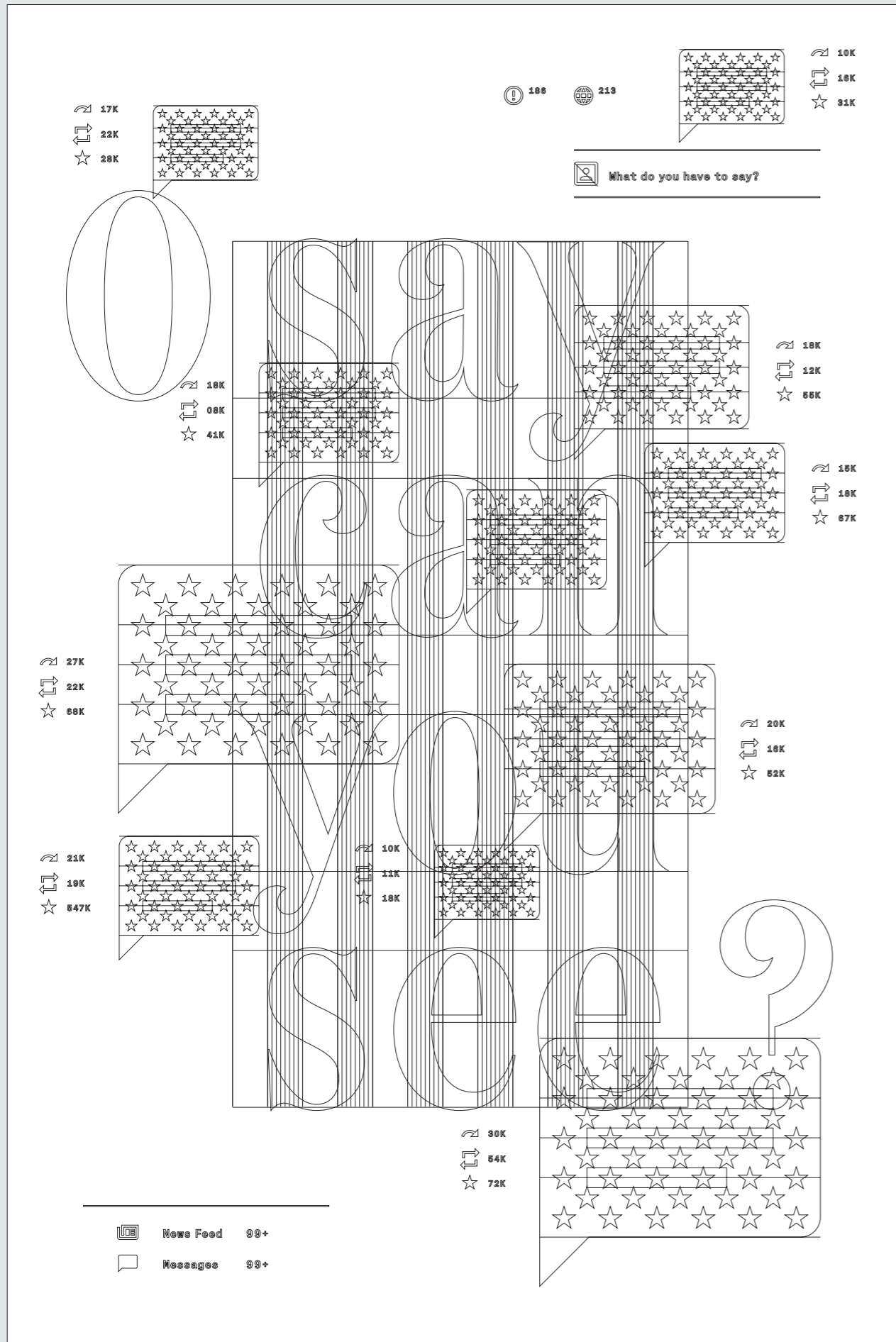'O say can you see?' is set on the traditional layer.
The four words with matching character counts
are stacked on top of each other. The preceding
'O' outdents, the final character, the questionmark,
hangs in asymmetrical balance (making a subtle,
political joke). The high-contrast, sharp serif
qualities found in colonial-era Latin type were
maintained, while the swash terminals were
increasingly emphasized, mimicking the waving
of a flag. The contemporary, foreground layer
distorts historic guidelines found in the *Canons
of Page Construction* . Their reimagined use
amasses a congested field of icons, obscuring
the underlaying typography. These symbols
that are often used today to represent text-based
work, assault the three posters in a manner
likened to our perpetual state of alert and sharing.

This text was co-edited in the Spring
of 2017 by Stuart Bertolotti-Bailey,
tweleve classmates, and myself in a
Google doc while it was projected
on the classroom wall. The type-tool
cursors above demonstrates what
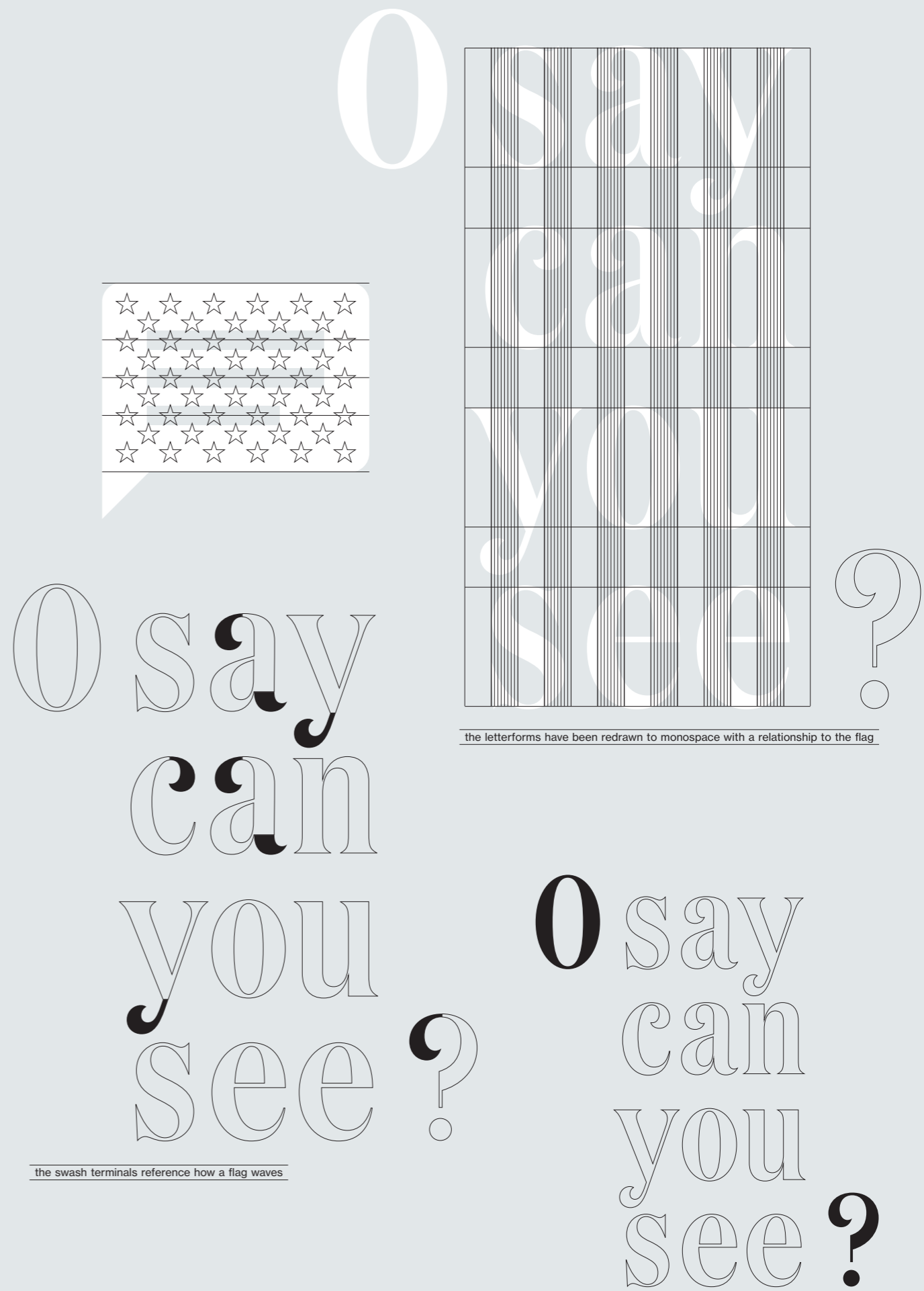this live-edit looked like — a frenzy.

22K
28K

10K
16K
31K

18K
08K
41K

18K
12K
55K

15K
18K
67K

20K
16K
52K

10K
11K
18K

21K
19K
547K

30K
54K
72K

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK   SUPER VISION   WHAT ARE WE SAYING

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK   SUPER VISION   WHAT ARE WE SAYING

News Feed   99+
Messages   99+

the letterforms have been redrawn to monospace with a relationship to the flag

O say
can
you
see ?

the swash terminals reference how a flag waves

O say
can
you
see?

a subtle political joke, a timeline across two presidents

United States of States

This contemplative, computation project explores national visual identity and responsiveness to the emotional state of the Union. Just as the stars on the U.S. flag represent the states of the nation, with a click of the mouse users can change a star to represent the emotional state they feel about the nation.

I have coded the site in Node so the server will collect, store, and display back all actions of all users across all browser windows. Meaning users can see what other users are doing. In gaming vernacular, this could be called *mechanical turk* infinite *whack-a-mole*.

At a moment when part of the population seeks to be great again, perhaps the U.S. has both an identity and a history problem. By my quick count, the U.S. has had 47 flags, the first six having no stars. Beyond the thirteen-bars representation of the of the current flag, the Encyclopædia Britannica states that the red bars symbolize valor, and the white bars symbolize purity.
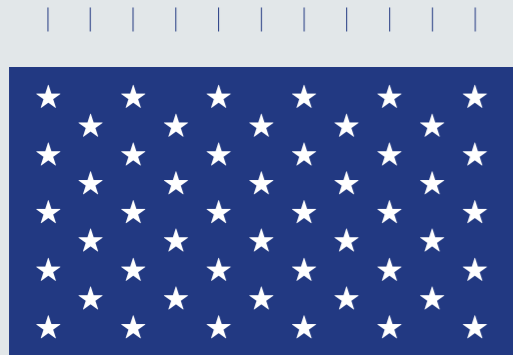
Perhaps a shift to a flag with no bars might help refocus the national dialog on the present rather than the past, as well, away from toxically-misinterpreted ideas like purity.
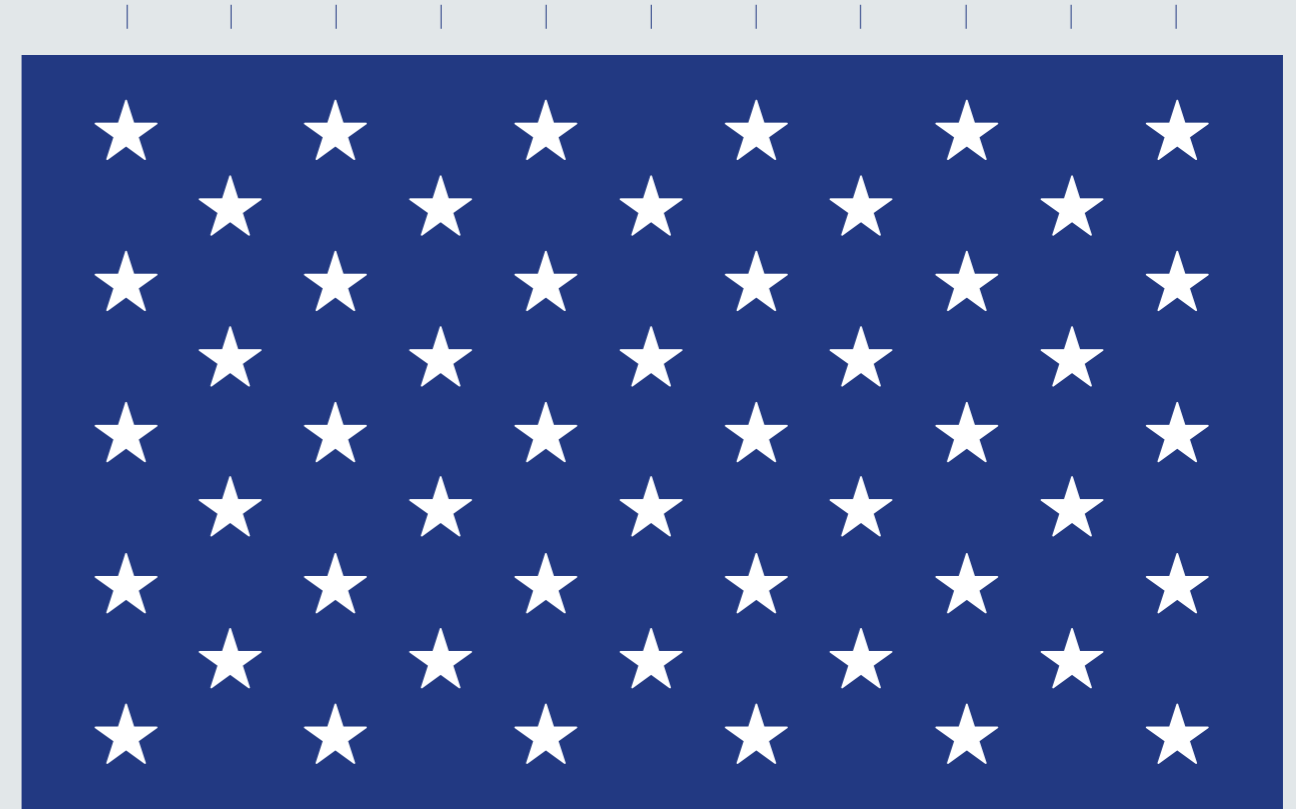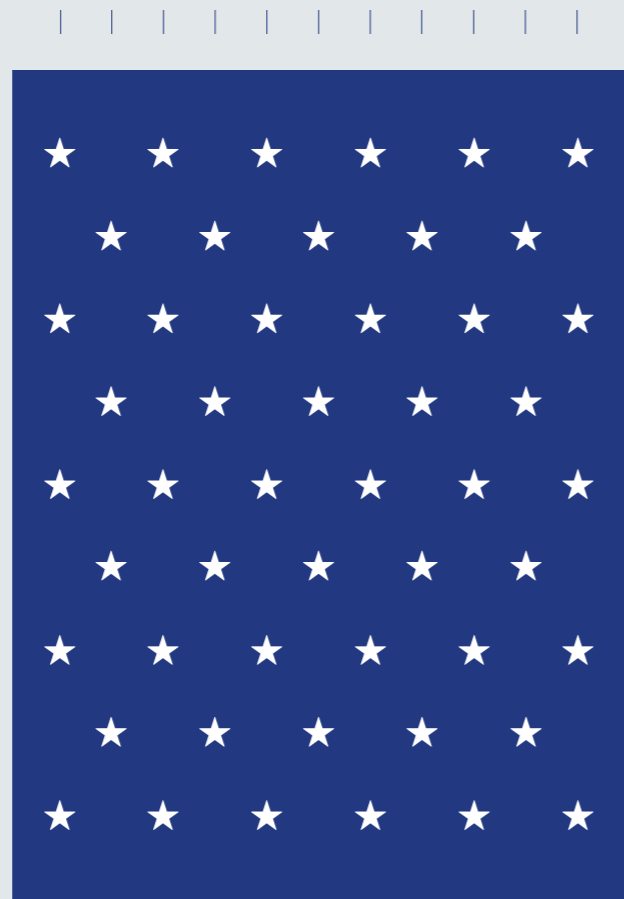
What is the states of our states?
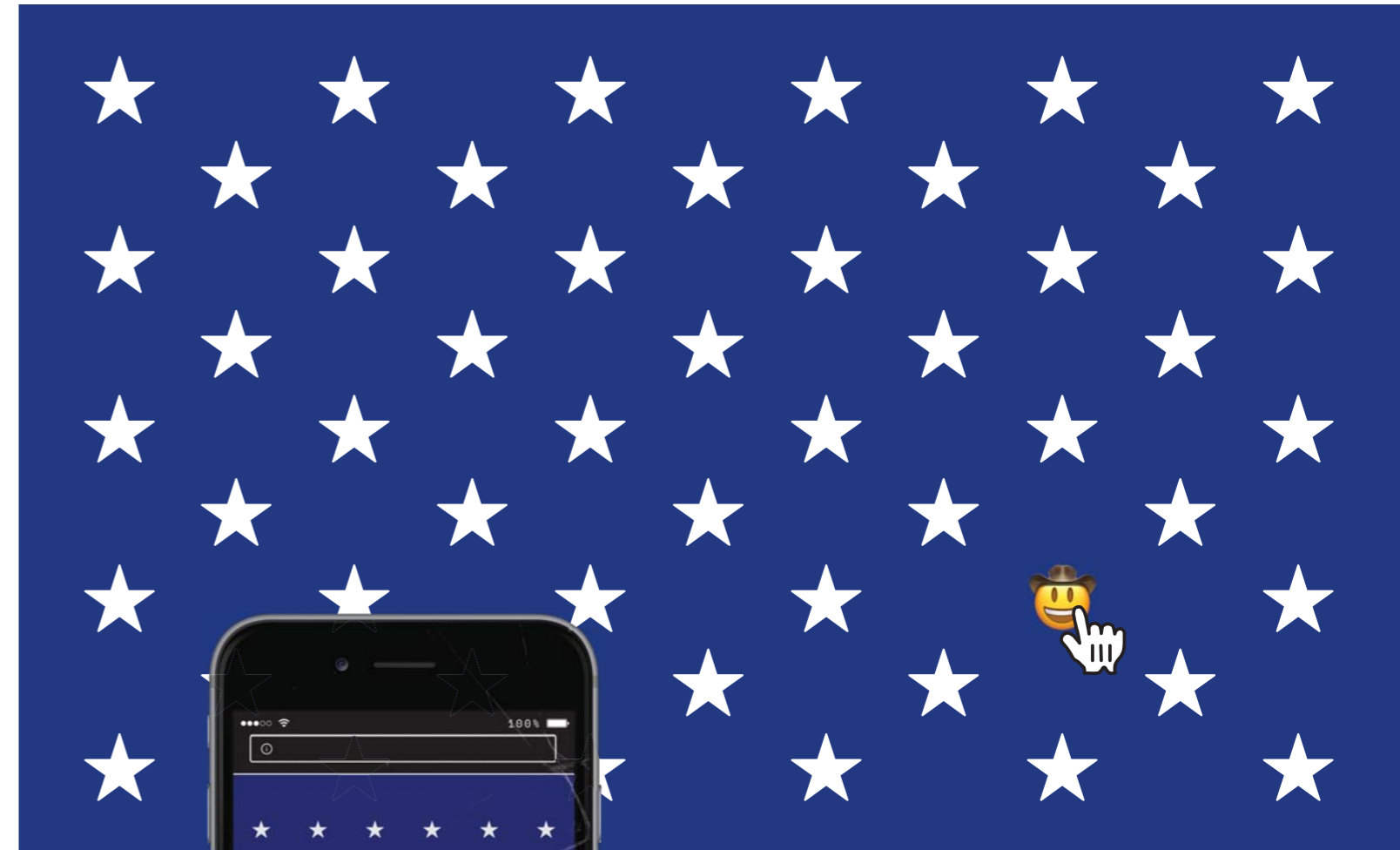
the state of 'cowboy'

the actions of one user is shared across all users

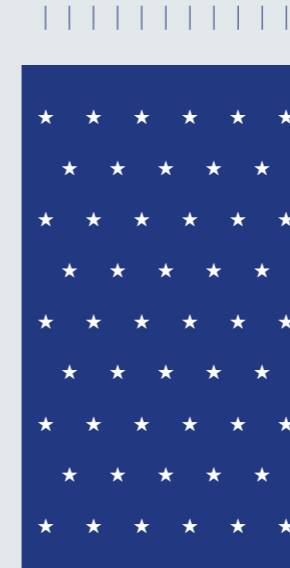building the site in HTML, each stars is set with a fixed position

this allows the stars to always maintain their position relative to the frame which may change sizes

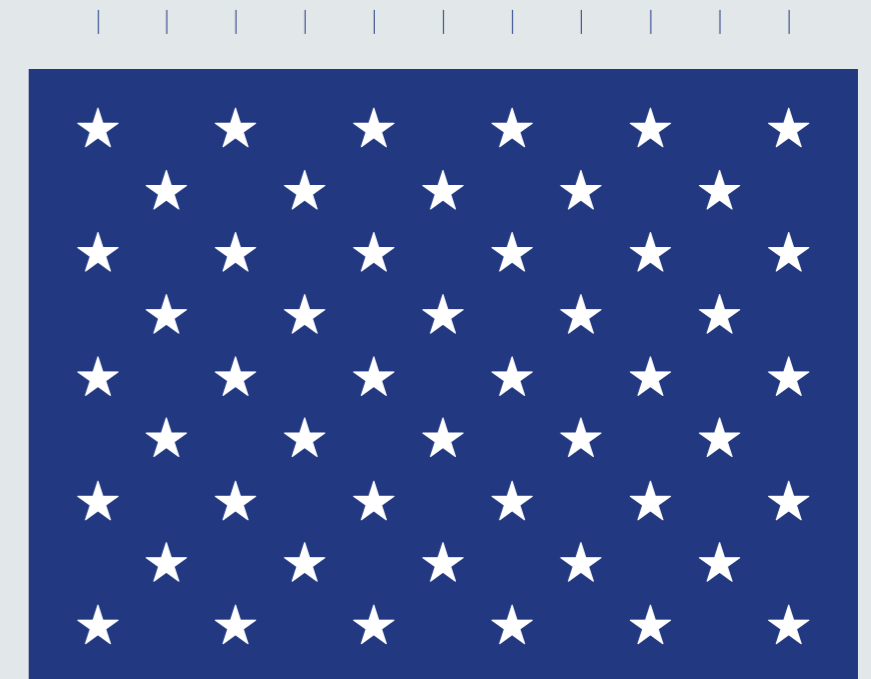8.33%   16.66%   25%   33.33%   41.66%   50%   58.33%   66.66%   75%   83.33%   91.66%

9.09%

18.18%

27.27%

36.36%

45.45%
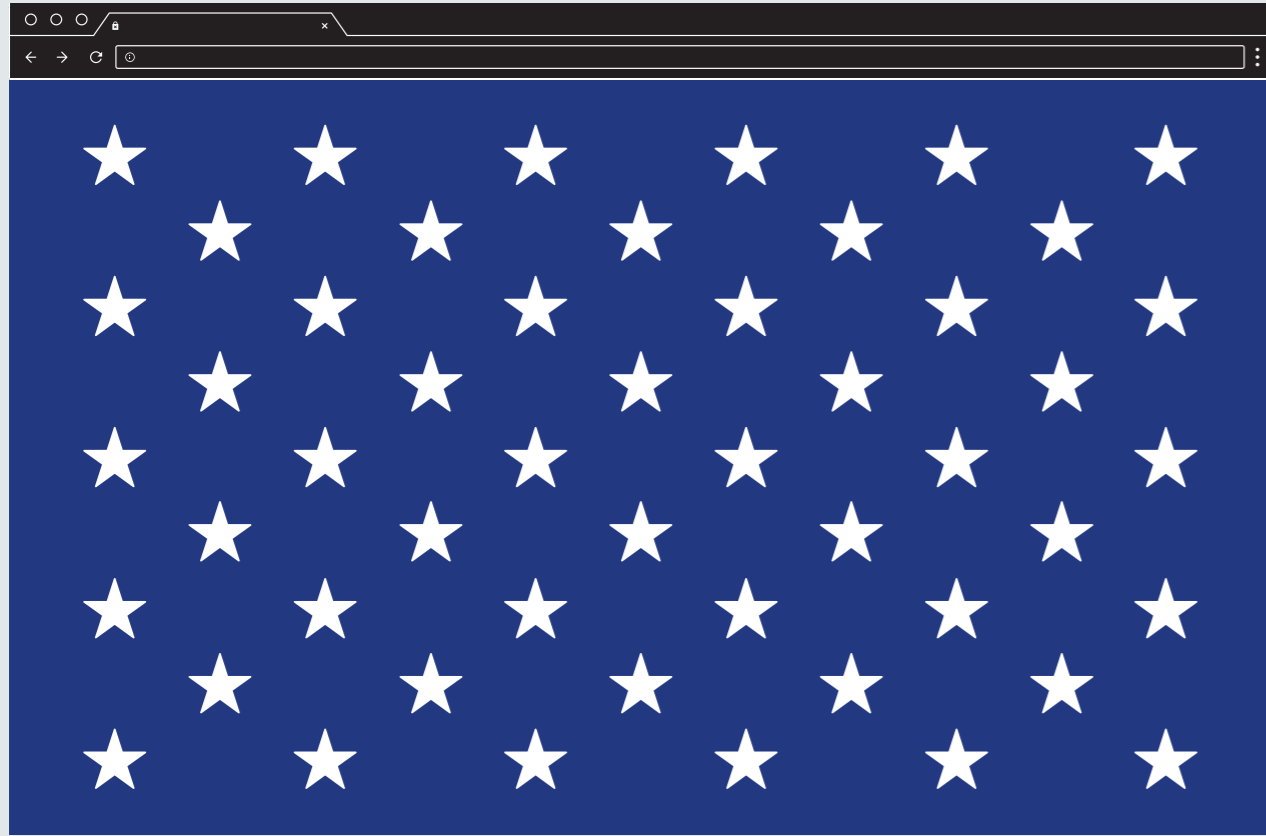
54.54%

63.63%

72.72%

81.81%

the fixed position is defined by X and Y percentages

even in very different aspect ratios

standard 1920×1250 screen environment
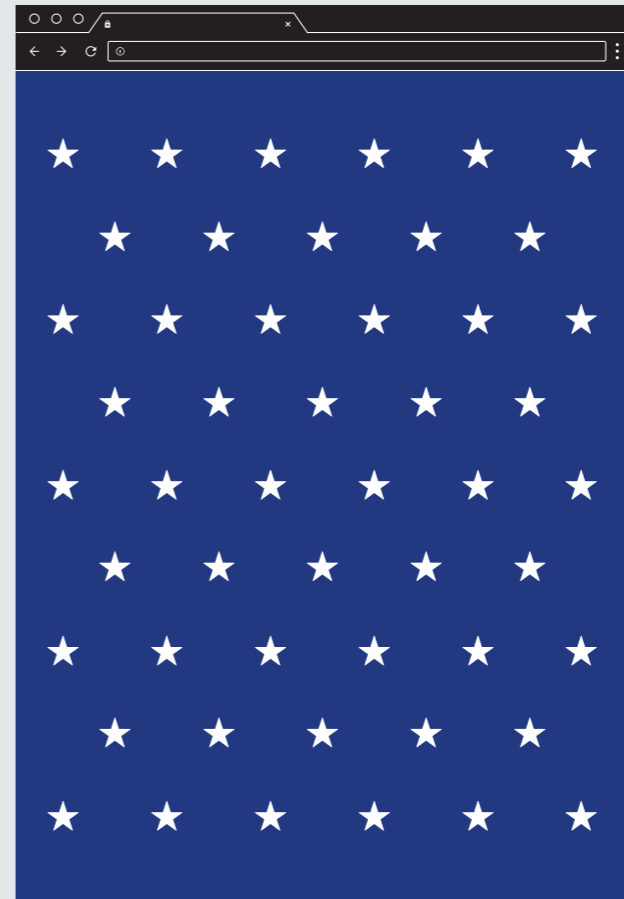
tablet set to vertical display
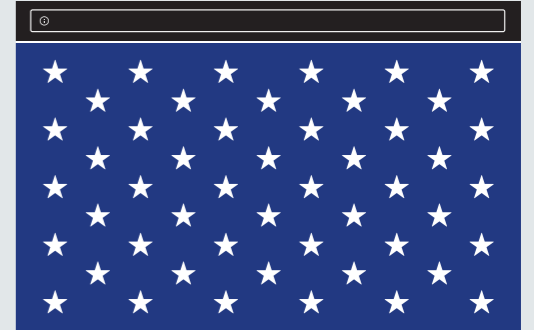
phone set to horizontal display
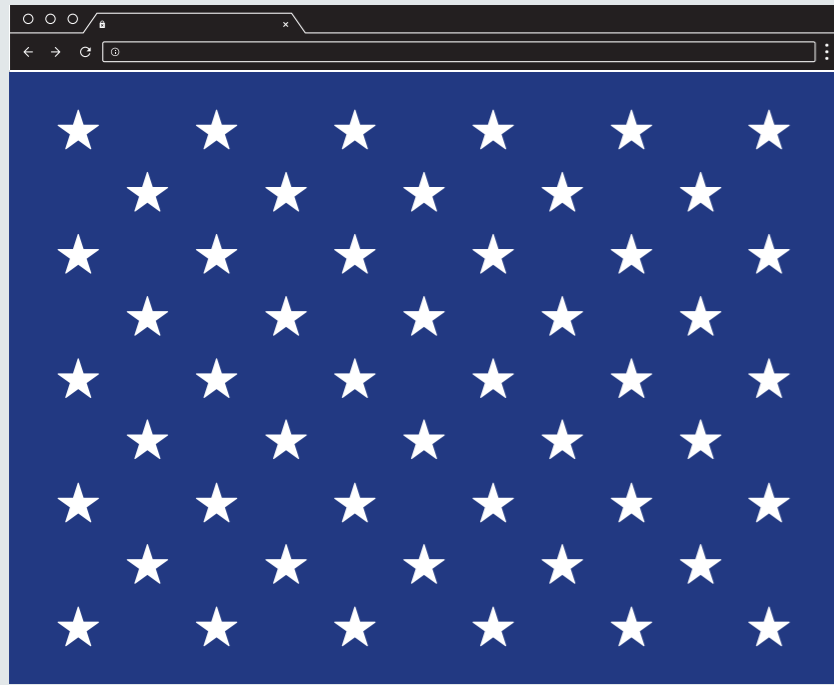
tablet set to horizontal display

phone set to vertical display
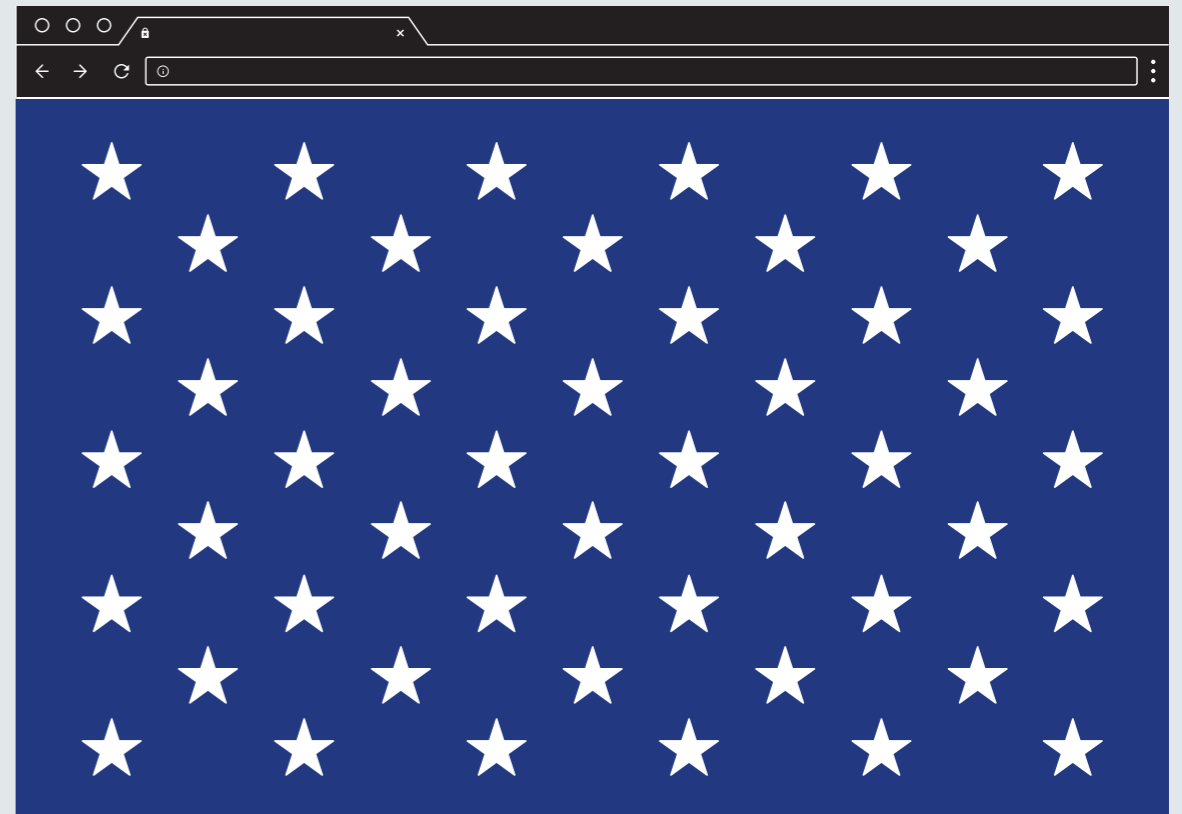
standard 1440×900 screen environment
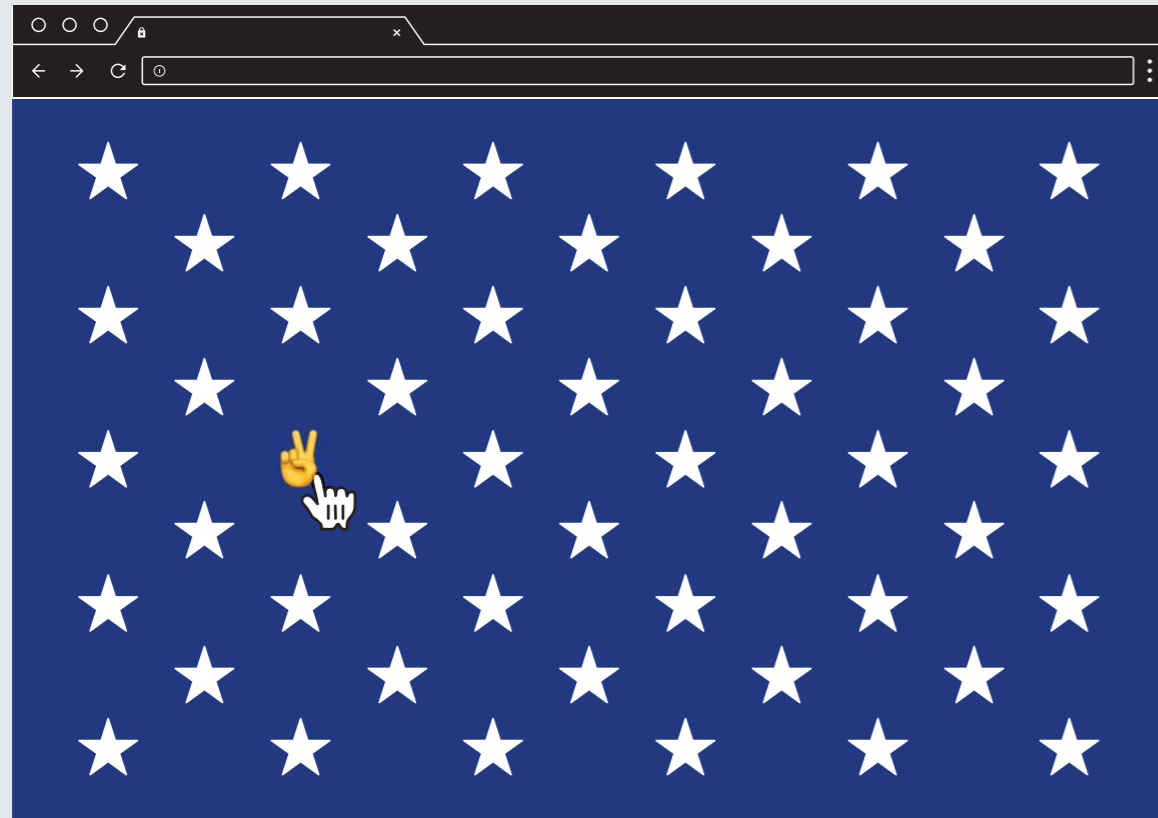
users can actively set the emotional state they feel about the nation
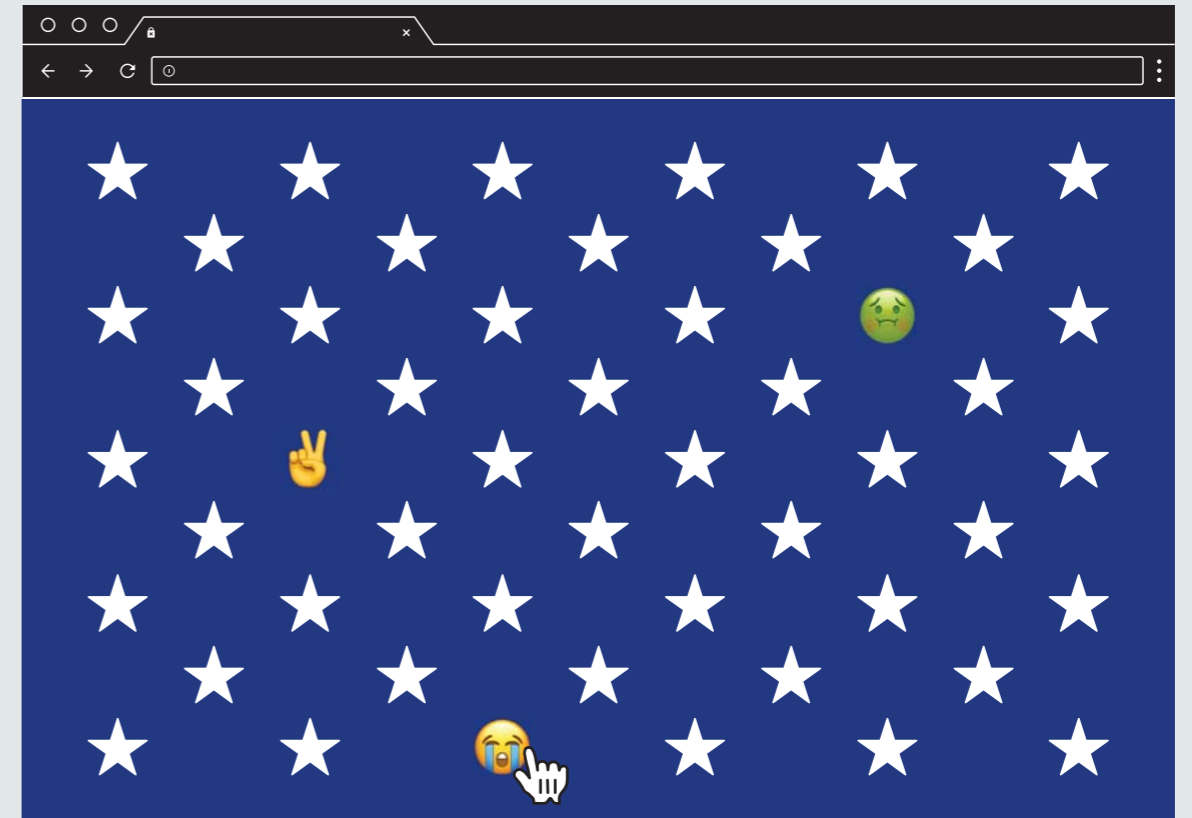
the site pulls from a curated selection of Unicode emoji characters
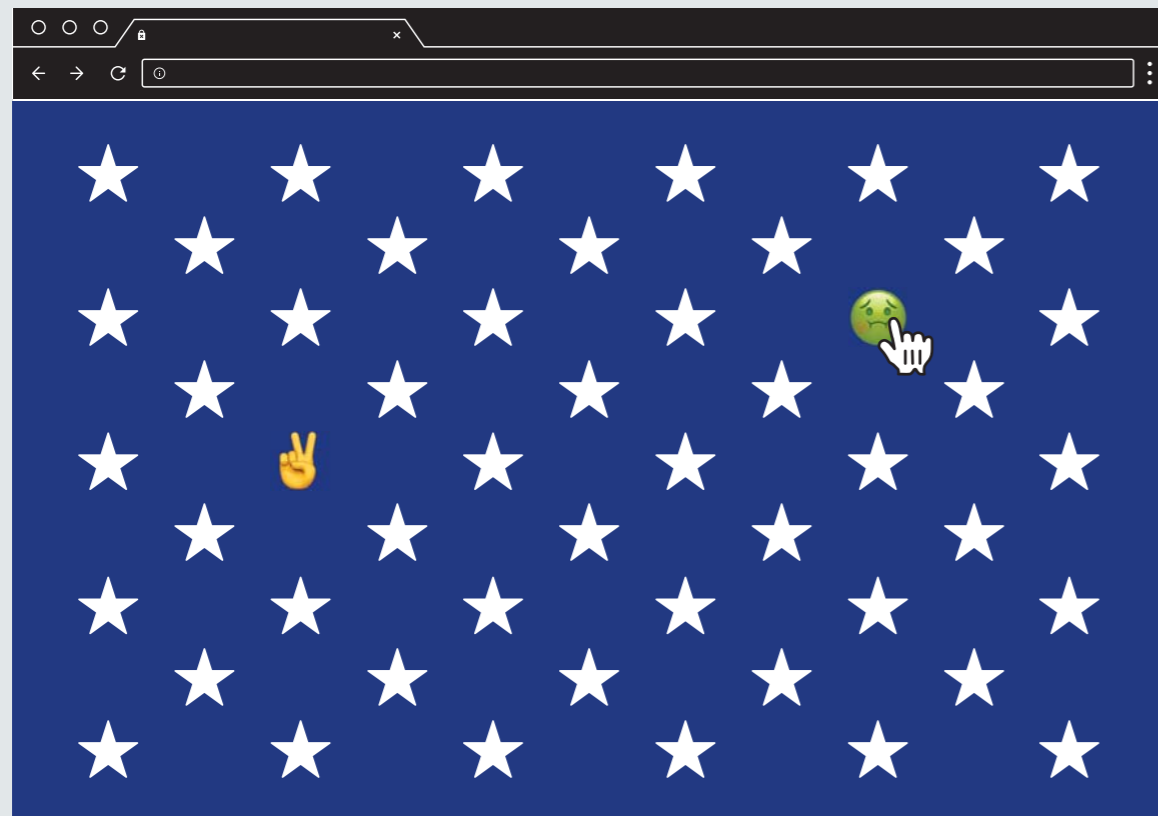
users are free to change as many as they like
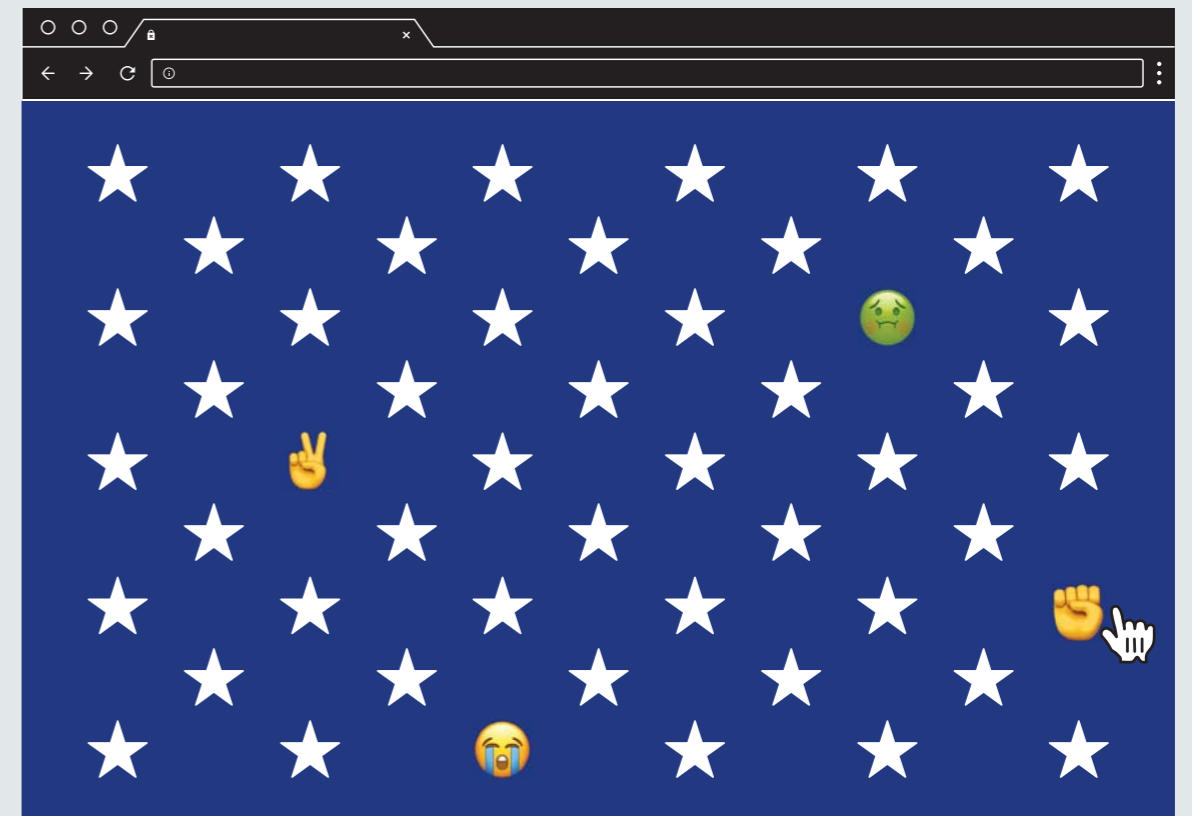
each star is capable of setting 1 of 200 emotions
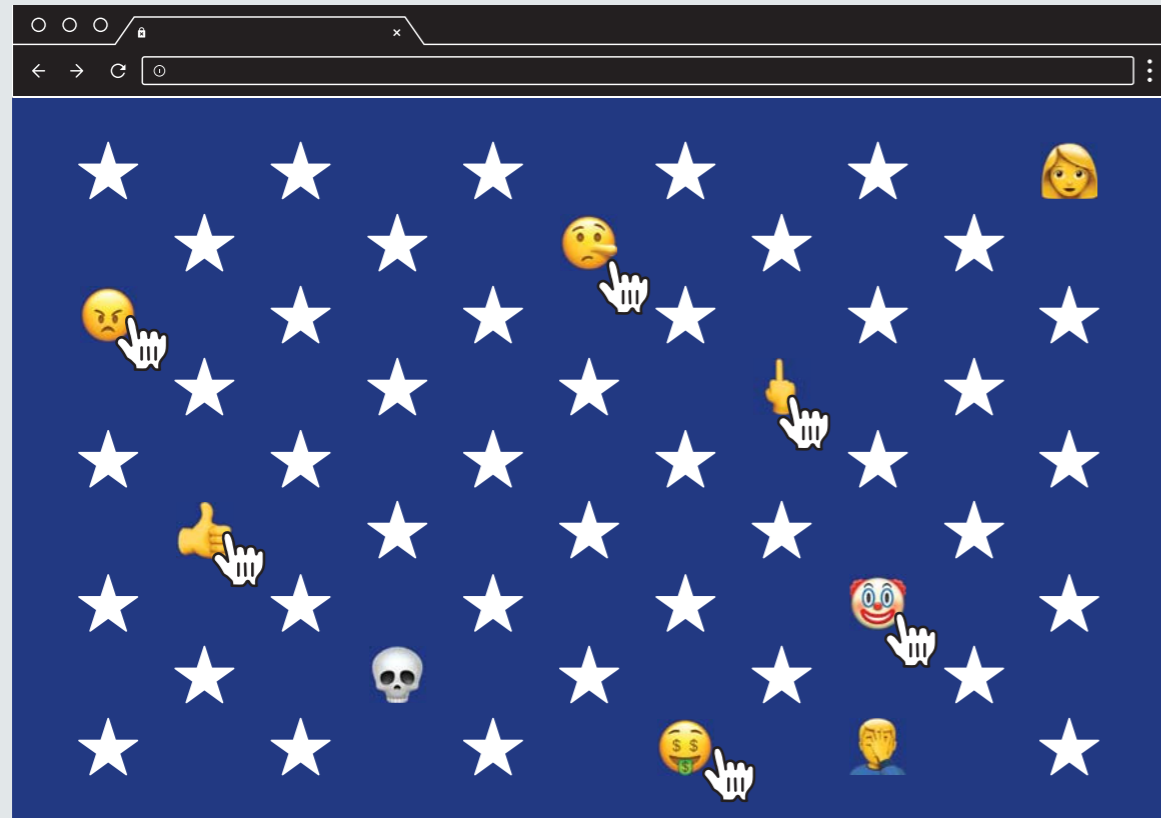
building a websockets API for the site allows each user's actions to be broadcast across every open browser window
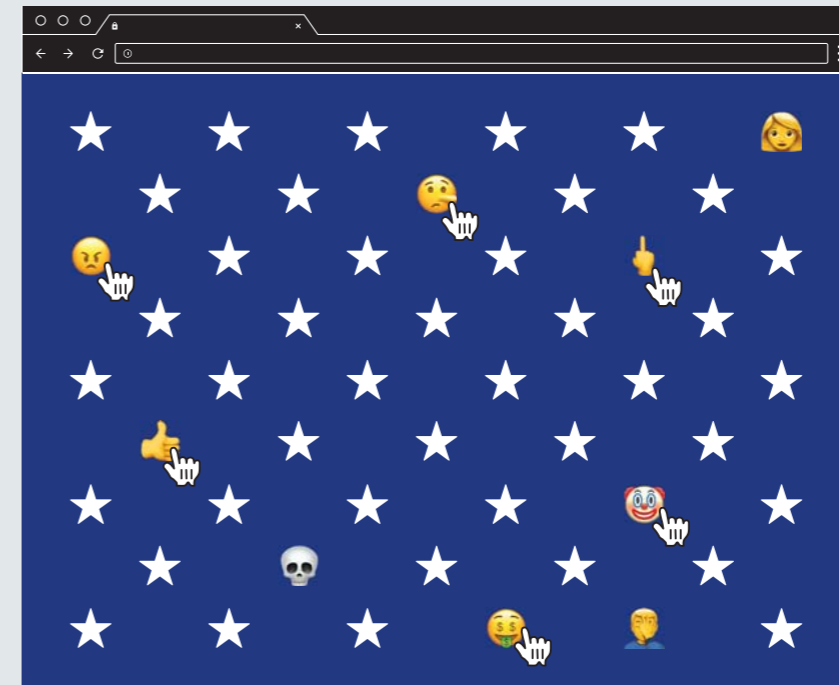
every user gets to see every other user's action and cursor
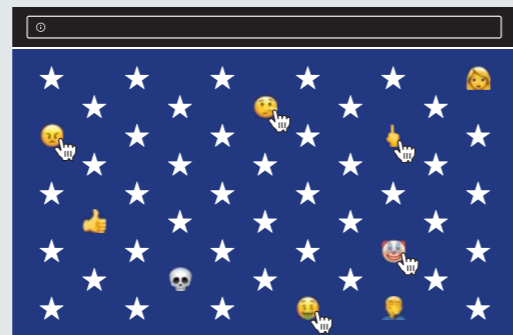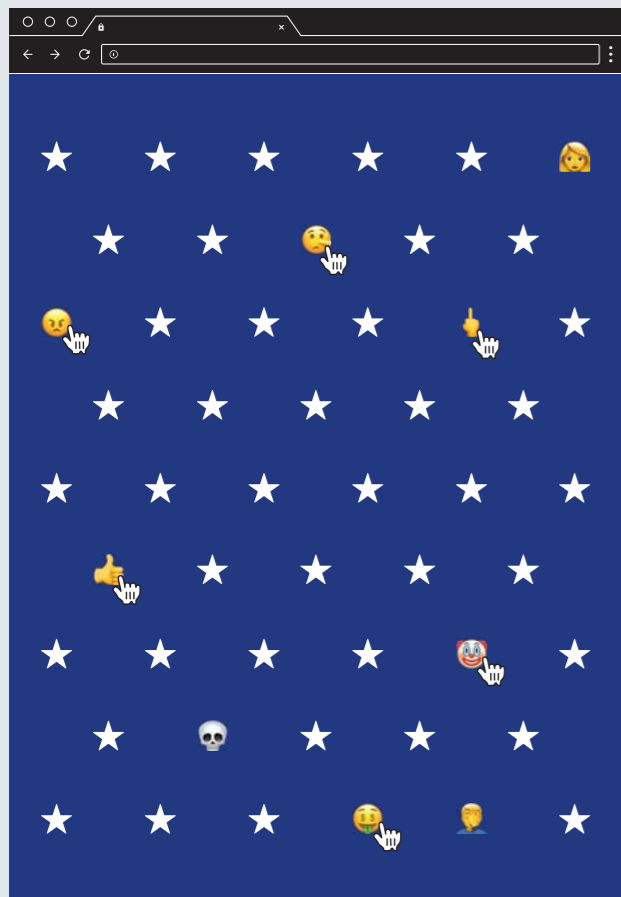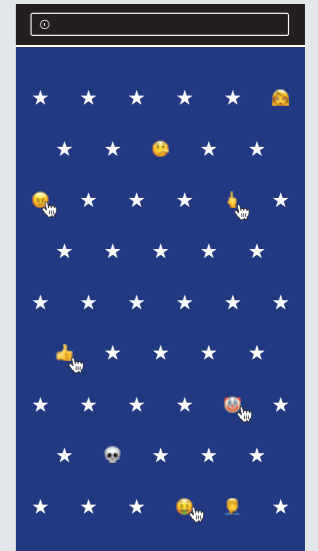
the function is the same on mobile and desktop
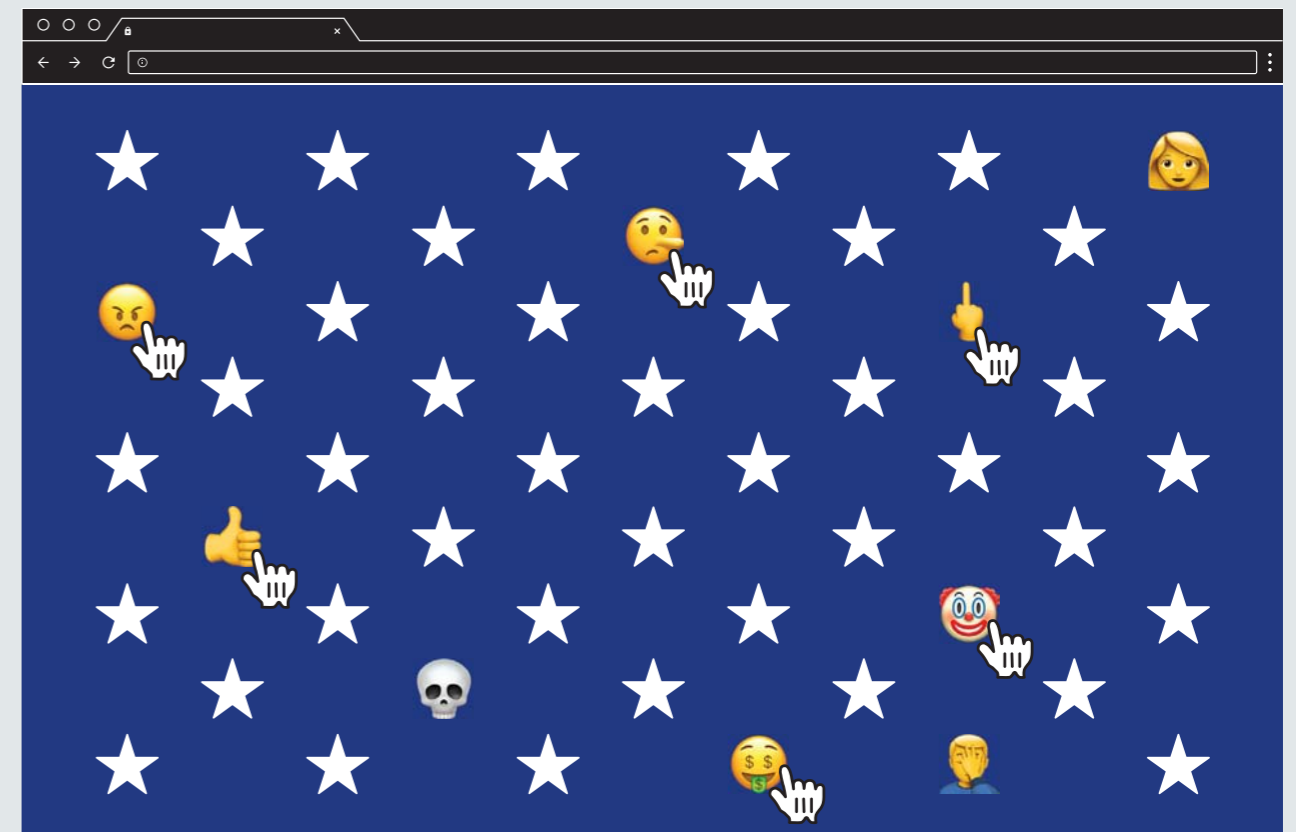
the six browser windows on this spread show the six users using the site

users tend to team-up in attempt to craft a totalizing narrative
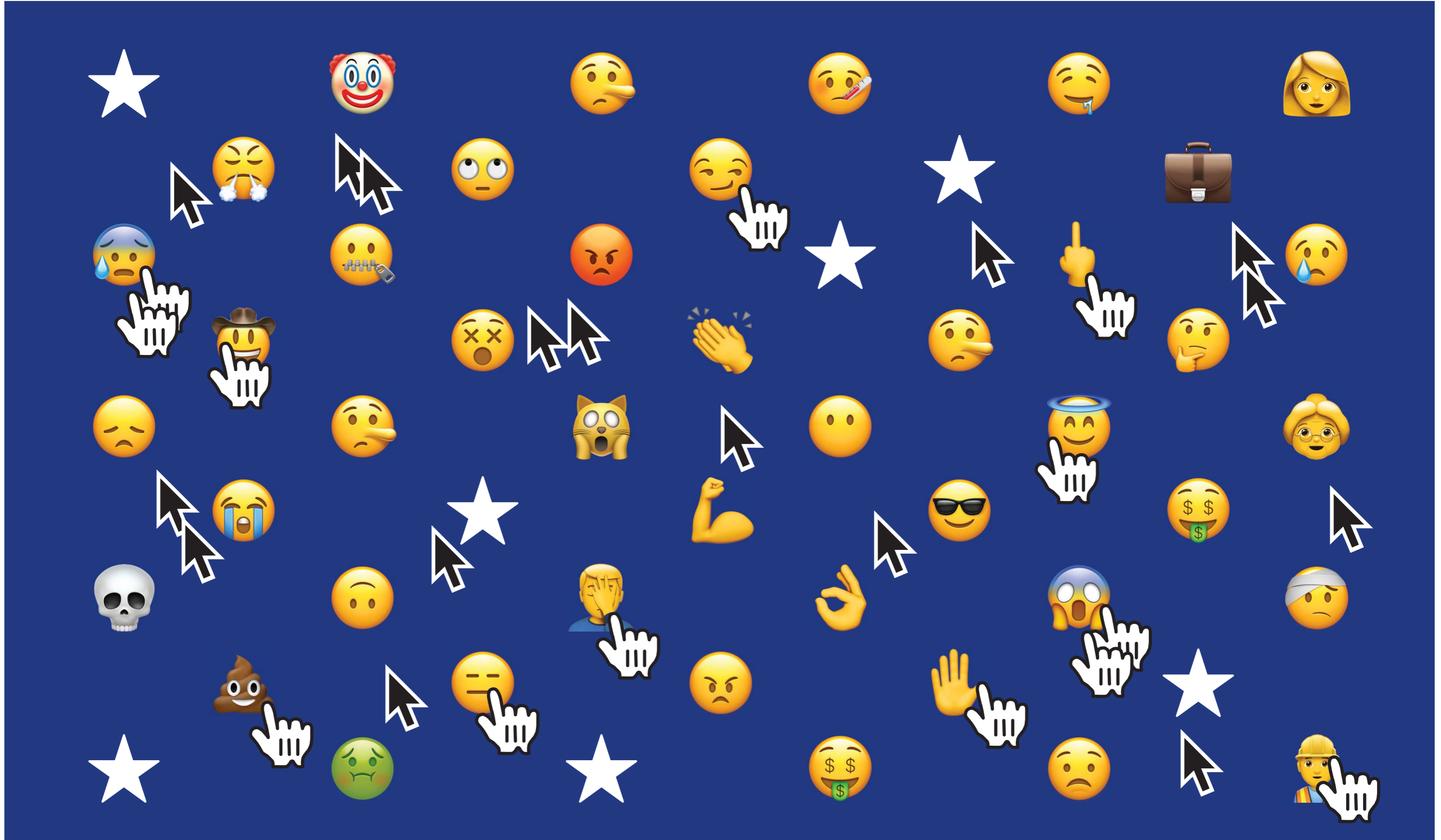
the site functions as an infinite whack-a-mole as users undo each other's state

29 active users, 43 states expressed
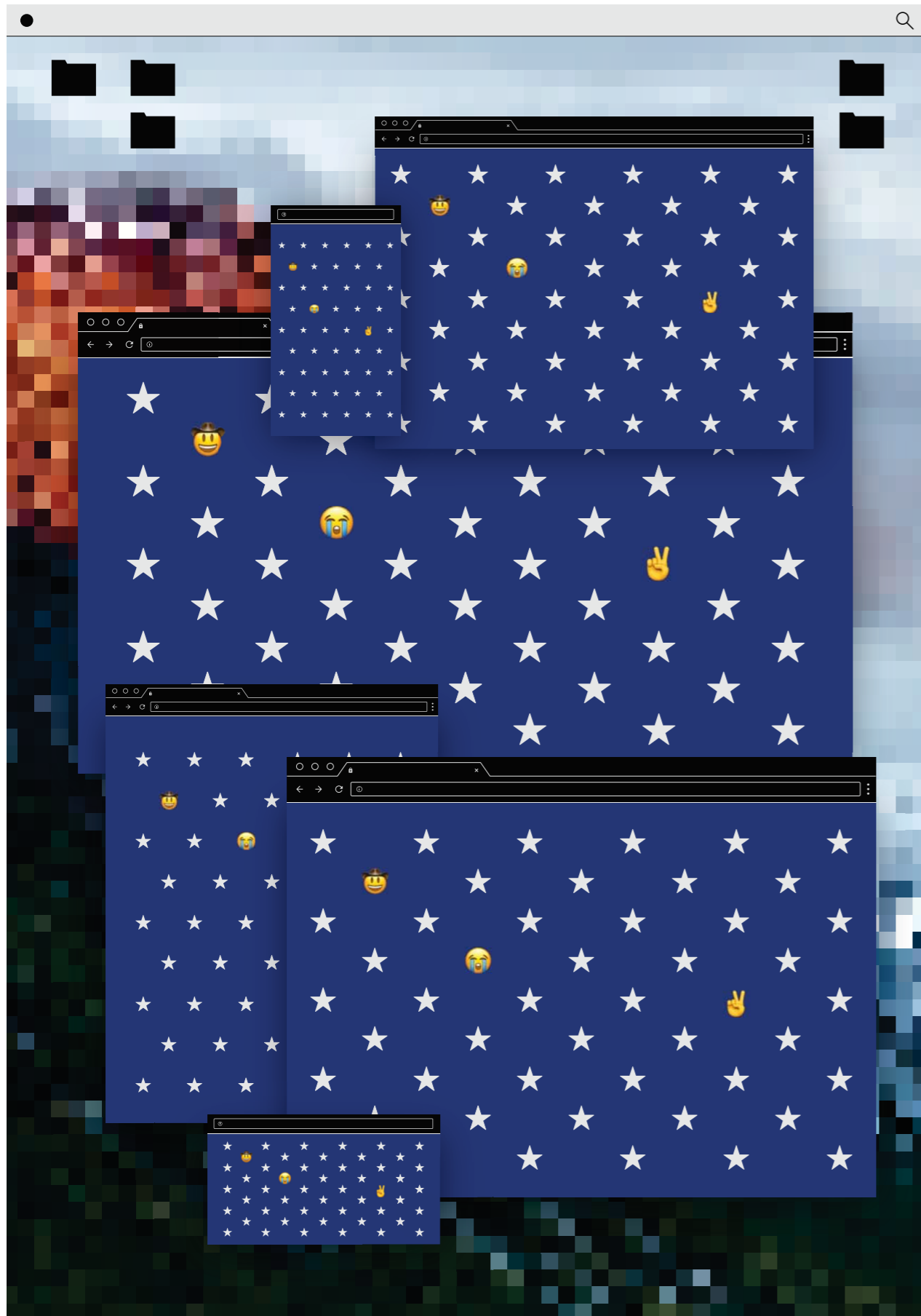
90.5 × 128 cm weltformat poster designed for the 2017 RISD Graphic Design Biennial

as the site was coded on an iMac running OS X, the iconic El Capitan background was brought into the poster

Apple's default El Capitan background
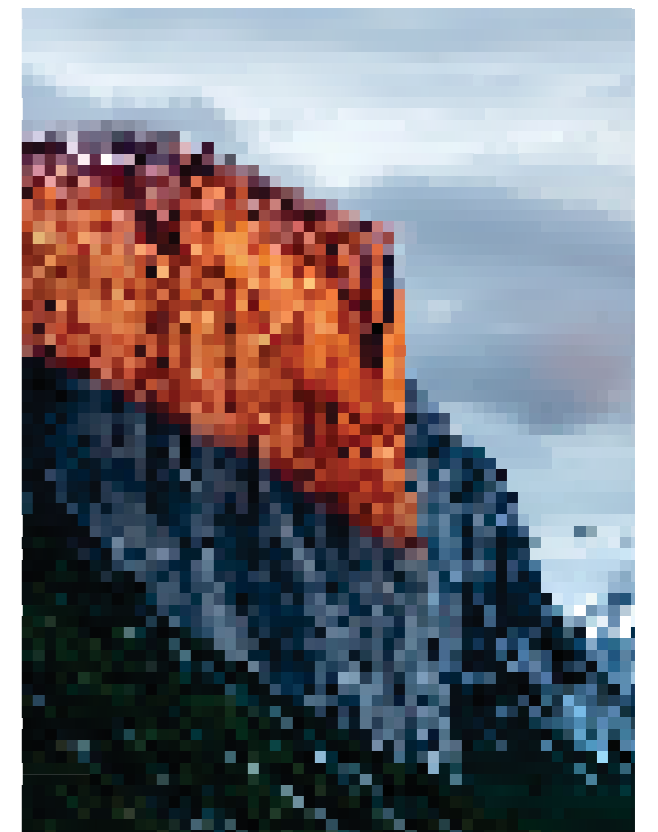
a Processing.JS script was written to take some ownership of the image

Input Output Uniform

When designer E. Roon Kang came to RISD
as part of the *Visiting Designer Series*, he prompted
the class to create input/output systems
in which there would be a causal relationship.
In a 36-hour intensive workshop I designed, spaced,
and published an uppercase typeface titled
Uniform. Its slightly condensed, heavy weight,
low-contrast, chopped curves, 90° counters
visually connect to the letters found on the backs
of uniforms and the sides of military vehicles.
Setting any word, phrase, or sentence in *Uniform*
causes the tone to seem official and blunt.
The words 'public' and 'gestalt' were then set in *Uniform*,
cut in vinyl and applied to the shoulder portion
of the backs of t-shirts, transforming the shirt
into a uniform. These lettered shirts where given
to classmates and E. Roon Kang. Through gestalt,
this type style and the placement on the shirt
transformed the individual bodies into a connected
body of authority.

Men's Police K-9 Performance T-Shirt (Black / Gray)
Large
from Thirteen Fifty Apparel

Size Chart + Thirteen Fifty Apparel's relaxed fit performance ready shirts,
are strategically designed by first responders for first responders.
Constructed with our specially ... **more »**

Size: L · **Shop all sizes »**

$24.95
+$2.05 tax and $4.27 shipping
Thirteen Fifty Apparel

Shop

Uniform type paired with uniform t-shirts seen daily in the U.S.

Police uniform t-shirts can be purchased and worn by anyone

HI MOM I AM DOING FINE

Uniform set at 148pt/121 pt

FREEZE POLICE

Uniform set at 230pt/242 pt

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

SUPER VISION

INPUT OUTPUT UNIFORM

ABCDE
FGHIJKL
MNOP
QRSTUV
WXYZ

Uniform set at 148pt/121 pt

ABCDE

FGHIJKL

MNOP

QRSTUV

WXYZ

Uniform set at 36pt/121 pt

ABCDE

FGHIJKL

MNOP

QRSTUV

WXYZ

Uniform set at 72pt/121 pt

GUARDIANS VERSUS WARRIORS

Uniform set at 92pt/72pt

FROM THE OBAMA PRESIDENTIAL TASK FORCE ON TWENTY FIRST CENTURY POLICING

Uniform set at 24pt/36pt

LAW ENFORCEMENT CULTURE SHOULD EMBRACE A GUARDIAN RATHER THAN A WARRIOR MINDSET TO BUILD TRUST AND LEGITIMACY BOTH WITHIN AGENCIES AND WITH THE PUBLIC

Uniform set at 56pt/56pt

POLICE

classmates were able to select 'gestalt' or 'public' shirts

t-shirts were made with opaque white vinyl

E. Roon Kang with 'gestalt shirt, via Professor Johns

classmates were able to select 'gestalt' or 'public' shirts

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

SUPER VISION

INPUT OUTPUT UNIFORM

MASTER OF FINE ART

GESTALT DIRECTOR TEACHER DESIGNER CRITIC

I HAVE STARTED TO READ THIS AESTHETIC TONE

NOT SO MUCH AS AGGRESSIVE

JUST AS SCARED

the NRA's logo has a similar lettering style, and those folks seems freaked out

EXTRAORDINARY

extraordinary, *n* first used, 1460
: Out of the usual or regular
course or order; often in expressed
opposition to ordinary.
—*Oxford English Dictionary*

Extra Ordinary is my idea of over
delivering—going beyond good.

Talking with Erik Brandt

Erik Brandt is a graphic designer practicing under the studio name Typografika.[1] He is a Professor and is currently Chair of the Design Department at Minneapolis College of Art and Design (MCAD). Erik was selected to be a part of this thesis, in part, due to his highly graphic and typographic aesthetic, but also due to his creation of Ficciones Typografika.[2] Dedicated to typographic exploration within public space, this project has brought over 1,500 works of contemporary graphic design from around the globe to the Minneapolis street that he and his family live on.

Ficciones-Typografika is installed on Erik's garage

Nick Adam   I see a connection between my practice's exploration and your thoughts behind *Ficciones-Typografika* — bringing experimental form to public space. You seem to be a designer that highly considers design's position and role in public space. How would you articulate your thoughts on the publicness of graphic design?

Erik Brandt   Wow. Well, I came to graphic design in a backwards way. Originally, I studied Philosophy in undergrad and didn't begin practicing graphic design until years later. I was in Japan and began working at a magazine, at first on the editorial side, then on the journalistic side, eventually working my way up to the Editor position. Along that path I was learning Quark.

However, I grew up in Northern Germany and I always have seen Graphic Design as a public form. In those societies and especially where I grew up, and actually many other countries than the U.S., all see Graphic Design — and I'm talking beyond signage, storefronts, and stuff like this — as a part of culture. These cities also happen to embrace the concept of the pedestrian zone. In doing this, they embrace the concept of human scale and accessibility. With this, they too embrace the poster. The poster is, as Hofmann said many years ago, the pulse of what the city's culture is, it's what the tone of the city. The dimension of posters have a human-ness to it, it's on eye level. A person can closely experience the elements within it that calls their attention as it speaks on their level.

By contrast America, is largely built around the automobile. Except for parts of your home-city Chicago, and perhaps parts of New York, or maybe Montreal. So when I finally started studying Graphic Design — publicness, just as you have described, it was exactly my interest. It is odd that this is missing in the United States, Public space in the U.S. is quite different in its appreciation and experience of both the pedestrian and graphic design. And I'm not trying to dismiss the more standard projections of design, like books and things like that. Simply, graphic appreciation in the U.S. is antiquated.

Alex Finney, Ficciones Typografika

For my *Ficciones* project, I focused on the awkwardness of public space and the stage [billboard on his garage] that I built. It was something very unexpected for this country and certainly within the context of our neighborhood. In the minds of the public it doesn't belong there.

Nick   It's quite an interesting project. Your stage size is defined by three side-by-side, standard, low-cost, 'engineer prints' from bureaus like Kinko's. You could have simply glued those posters in the same orientation to your garage. However, I'd argue that the project would have failed in its impact, as we've all come to accept and dismiss the wheat-pasted poster. It's easy, and aesthetically they are ubiquitously different and experimental … unconsciously we expect that of these posters, therefore they are invisible. But, by building a frame as an extension of architecture that kicks off your garage, the project gains visibility. The frame, it's outdoor-ness, and the aspect ratio, the posting work in consistent rotations are all things we read as billboards. Another thing that the public has been conditioned to dismiss, but then the work is highly diverse, experimental or contemplative. Like nothing, any person of the general public or designer has ever seen outdoors.

Leeza Pritychenko, Ficciones Typografika

Erik   (laughs) It seems to be perceived that way. Definitely by the people in the neighborhood. My family and I live in South Minneapolis, in the Powderhorn Park neighborhood, and early on in the project people began stopping by telling me, they've changed the route they go to work, walk the dogs, ride their bikes, take a walk, just to see what is the next thing I'd post out there. People tend to stop by frequently.

There was a construction worker a couple summers ago. He saw me outside near my garage, screeched his F150 to stop and began yelling, Oh man!! I've gotta ask you, man: What the fuck is this? It's driving me crazy. I love this, but, what is it?

Daniel Christensen, Ficciones Typografika

The other surprise is that as people see or hear of me and the project they assume, here is this guy that makes all these posters. When I tell them they actually are submitted from around the world — show them photos on my phone of work from Albania, or a famous person from Australia — they're always shocked. The conversations that I have person-to-person about the project are wild. It is wild how well people respond. The project arguably has a much larger presence online. It's been well received there too, and that is where a lot of the dialog on this project is.

I always thought of this project as a lowbrow, contemporary *Emigre*. That magazine was the only source of contemporary graphic design in the 90s. It is so sorely missed. Especially in U.S. graphic design circles, because we just don't have anything. Until recently, and I think it's the best thing that ever has happened to AIGA. Basically, they hired all the people from *It's Nice That* to run *Eye on Design* [laughs]. Then, finally … someone started writing good, broad-based articles on graphic design. The American market is super limited, at least to me. That was my hope for the project, that it could be a stage for experimental, or when it began five-years ago people would say 'speculative graphic design.' For many participants that was the interest.

Nick What do you see is the importance and the opportunity of bringing diverse, experimental, contemplative works to public spaces?

Eric When I was building the board, it was like, why hadn't I done this earlier? The project was a natural outgrowth of a blog I use to run, *Geotypografika*. Similarly, I was looking for interesting people in town and around the world to write about. This project was the same thing. There was a very open-ended brief that began as an invitation but then I began to accept submissions. For me, I was very aware, right away that it would have an international audience. I felt their is nothing like this, the materiality of it would be attractive, the activity, and frequency would be attractive. And what I hoped for, was genuine experimentation.

I talk about this with colleagues all over the world. There is a perception that in a place like Amsterdam that everything graphic design is awesome, it is contemporary, it is great, and that is absolutely not true. They too have bad graphic design, although, less than the U.S.

My thinking—and I discuss this in my classes— that it is our role as educators and students to push the field, because nothing interesting comes from popular culture. Anything that ever gained traction as an art form, began as a resistance, as a marginal activity. Look at music, there is Taylor Swift, then there is Kim Gordon. Taylor Swift is not adding anything substantive. I like thinking of early BeBop musicians, they'd turn their backs on the audience. I love that idea. They where that confident, they owned their craft, it was theirs.

Nick And that didn't make it less enjoyable. People came, they returned, it perhaps even added value.

Erik Yeah it did. Thanks for the 20 bucks at the door, you guys can hangout, we are going to do our best. This idea is so cool, this was radical for music and performance. Idealistically I wanted to be a part of something like that.

Nick I'd say that goes beyond yourself. The field can benefit from it's practitioners flexing more, and to do so publicly. To flex the imagination of the public. Earlier, you mentioned that teachers and students have a duty to advance the field, but I must add. It's all practitioners duties to advance form and visual culture.

Erik I know for a fact, that many of the Ficciones projects have appeared in decks at large agencies. Unfortunately, I had someone from the studio that made the *Airbnb* logo send me a photo of a *Ficciones* printed out large as inspiration. It was of a Benoît Bodhui typeface. It freaked me out. I shared it with Benoît and said, hey this is kinda cool and kinda scary. But that was the dream too.

When you read Keedy's *Global Style*, he was critical. I really appreciated it, it echoes all the brilliant old professors that I had a long time ago, and I love those old ideas. I also feel that there are designers that want to communicate and leave a trace in ways that push the form and subject away from what is expected. I think some of the submissions to *Ficciones* did that. I wouldn't claim that it changed a larger way of working, but it celebrated that.

I tease my friends at the *Walker Art Center* when talking to them about *Ficciones*. They are interested but have not supported it. I tell them, you realize that I've shown more contemporary Graphic Design in 4 years than you have ever. And I have the numbers to prove it. This is not to disrespect them. They do celebrate graphic design. Many of my former students work there and I love these people. But it is funny to be on the side-lines of the *Walker Art Center*.
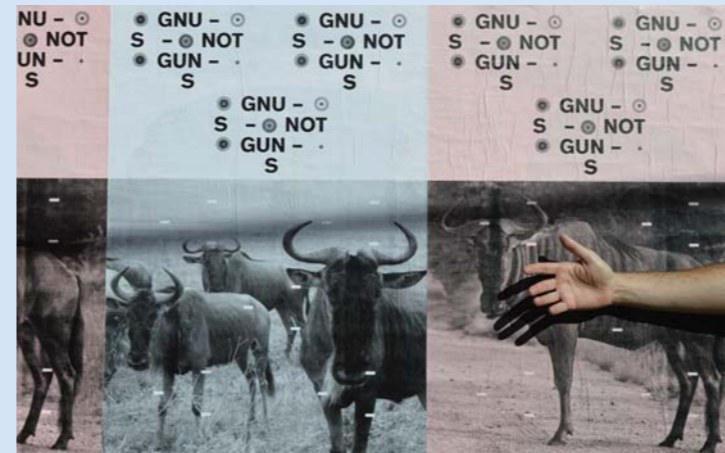
Just a little while ago, the police in my neighborhood started moving the sex workers off the main streets. There would be these two people that would stand next to my garage all day. I'd see them at 7AM when I'd start the day, and would say hello and talk some. Then there was this one day I came out with my kids and there was a client there. When the client saw me he shifted his attention to my kids and started saying, oh wow, do you see those, look at those posters, they are so cool. Then he said to me, this is really great work, I'm surprised there isn't graffiti over it. The sex worker then turned to him and said, yeah man, because it has respect, people understand that this is good and it is for the street. I was really taken back. On one hand, there is this transaction happening in front of my two little girls, and then there was this statement. I told them, I love you guys, I have nothing against what you are doing, I just wish you could do it somewhere else, but thank you, you totally get it, thank you!

Nick More important than the numbers that you have, you have an audience that no one else is attracting. I'm certain an objective of the *Walker* and many institutions is to connect with the community. While the *Walker* has a large space, human and financial resources, they also have the walls and the tone of an institution. This is simply a barrier to those unfamiliar with the codes of cultural institutions. Which I'd say are the people most in need of rich, new, different experiences. I'd say the board on your garage is making an impact that the *Walker's* recent $76 million capital campaign can never do. I love the Walker and think they are fantastic. However, your board is different, it over delivers in a space where we expect nothing, or less than nothing, simply passivity.

Eric That is a great point and I couldn't agree more.

Nick It is perfect timing for Graphic Design as a medium to be exploited and advanced in this manner. The proliferation of digital tools, devices, et cetera have the public interacting with graphic surfaces to a degree that everyone talks about what is good or bad design. *Ficciones* seems to build upon this societal moment to advance the understanding of what is possible. Let's face it, this is what's needed — a new future with new possibilities. The path we are on at best is underwhelming ... at worse it is terrifying.

Eric Graphic design has never been more visible, with the sheer amount of stuff that is being made and shared. There is also a frustration that things as great as the *New York Times* Art Section would never celebrate a typographer or graphic designer. It's always about architecture or art. Maybe that is slowly changing—I mean we have memes that make fun of graphic designers.

Last year, there was that skit on SNL about *Papyrus*. When Avatar came out in 2010, I was doing my blog and wrote about their use of *Papyrus*.[4] I wasn't simply bitching about *Papyrus*. I made the point that James Cameron and everyone on the film were geniuses to use *Papyrus*. They had a 237 million dollar budget. They invented infinite amounts of technology to make the film, they used *Papyrus* for the subtitle sequences and main title, and the movie has grossed $2.7 billion. Far more than every movie made before or after. They could have commissioned a unique typeface, for that matter they could have invented a new language. Highly competent and intelligent people made this decision, and can we say they were wrong? What does all of this mean?

Papyrus has massive cultural value in the mind of the public. It means graphic designers still have much work to do in advancing the public's visual culture.

Nick SNL, and most everyone missed the point. It wasn't that *Papyrus* was a stupid graphic design decision, it's that the general public's visual literacy places a high amount of value on *Papyrus*. The public handed over nearly $3 billion to a cliché so dry and ironic that we missed it. One can make the case that setting Avatar in *Papyrus* is an act of meta-modernism, where it is purposely equal parts serious and ironic.

Eric The designer read the audience and knew how pull their strings. That is what graphic design often does: it finds them, it's like, okay get over this people. Can we actually look more critically at what this means? Anyway my response was better.

Nick In respect to not only *Ficciones* but your own work that is highly typographic … how would you articulate the importance of typography and typographic advancement and experimentation?

Eric That is a great question. I suppose it's hard to say. One can make a strong argument that it there is absolutely no importance to it at all. [laughs] Do you know a friend of mine in Germany, Sascha Lobe? He teaches at Offenbach Academy of Art.

Sascha began a conference called *Bable* and had all sorts of people like Paula Scher and Jeffery Keedy come. Sascha made a comment about speculative design. Scher had said she felt students should not get engage with it. This was five years ago, that that's what many people were saying. Keedy said, you can choose to engage with it, but you'll have a cold shower when you can't sell it to a client.

You can't say that Paula Scher is wrong. Look at her career. However, I'm coming from a different perspective. Especially towards capitalism. I'm an anti-capitalist. The large studios that claim influence are also the dead last to take any risk with anything. That is why, in my mind, the forward movement of graphic design is near unbearably slow. It seems to me, and I say this with respect to their work — they just seem to play towards the lowest common denominator. They don't seem to believe in people. To believe in people's intelligence.

Much more is possible, and what we get in the U.S. is that fucking Verizon check-mark. It's a small-minded way of thinking about the human experience. But of course, let's keep in mind—I practice in my basement studio and they have offices on 5th Avenue. [laughs] So who's right?

Nick Well, let's not be dismissive because of money. Let's remember these 5th Avenue studios have walls pinning up your work that was glued to a piece of wood, hanging on your garage in Minnesota. It's important to remember that your sacrifice to not follow their steps, is getting them to be inspired by your trail. I too have had friends shoot me photos of my work in the decks of large agencies. It's the greatest compliment they can give. Essentially what they are saying is, I wish we could [laughs]. If visual culture on a mass-scale is to shift, it is in these decks that new exciting, previously unimaginable things must be brought in or realized.

ERIK In a broader design scene you don't see this as much as you see it in graphic design. This pisses me off about our field. You have so-called successful designers saying don't make posters, go make something screen-based, go make a book, go make a site.

Nick I've always interpreted this as 'focus on the medium or the tools and less on the formal making.' I see this as destructive — the tools and medium will always come and go and change and to some degree will be a thing that could be learned in a week or less. While it's important to be agile, to me, the formal craft and ideas are where one must invest time. At least, this is what's important to me, and why I took a sabbatical to pursue an MFA. I have plenty of large, digital, interactive, projects in my portfolio … I have nothing to prove there. In terms of formal making, and craft … this is where we all have so much more work to do.

Erik For sure and this will always be the case. I recall a couple years ago I was prompting a student to investigate the internet and tools of social media more so, and they simply didn't care. They said they were tired of interaction in this manner and didn't care to invest time into it. So I pushed the opposite way to professionalizing their inquiry. Which totally made sense. There will always be a backlash to the common culture. Well, let's hope.

There is a hell of a lot of worry right now. Obviously some people are beginning to lash back at Facebook. What you've been talking about makes a hell of a lot of sense — you are talking about things being made with more significance, in effort to improve our experience and the experience between people.
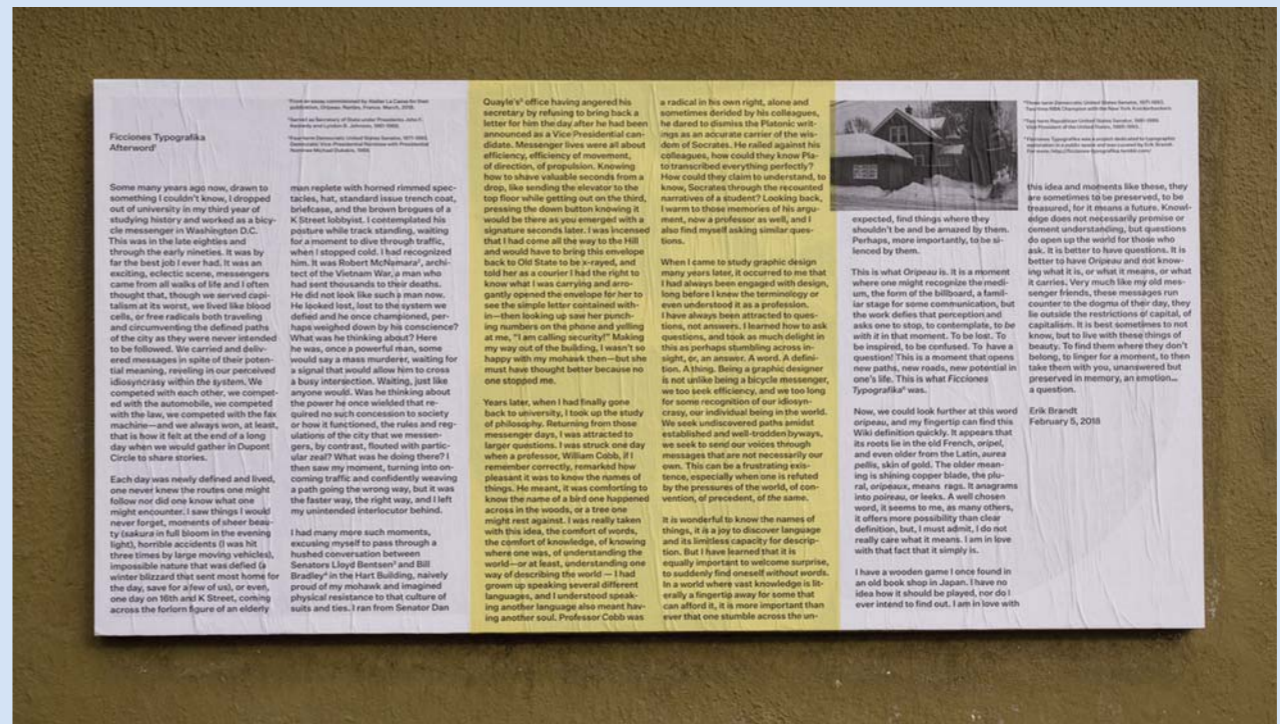
THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

Nick This is what I see as so exciting about graphic design. It's intended for public eyes. My interest is not about public space in respect to private space and ownership. Everything that I'm talking about is how graphic surfaces are the contemporary common ground. It is where our gaze is focused. Regardless of background, belief systems, politics, et cetera, the streets we walk down, the identity system or the movie billboard we see, the interfaces we tap are the same for each of us. Positioning graphic design as *Public Work* is an opportunity to see the designers role as one capable of improving life. This is such a great opportunity, our public space is so incredibly underwhelming .

Erik Oh man. For sure. I just wrote a piece call *afterword* and posted it to the *Ficciones* boards. It speaks to exactly these thoughts. I'll share it with you. Please, let me know your thoughts on it and let's keep this conversation going.

Nick Am I interpreting this right, *afterword* means *Ficciones* is in it final state? Why end it?

Erik Yeah man [laughs] it's all over. About two years ago I was speaking with Adrian Shaughnessy and Tony Brook from *Spin* that runs *Unit Editions*. I wanted to see if they would be interested in doing a book for *Ficciones-Typografika*. After thinking about it for a couple weeks they said that actually their publication model focuses on things that are older, not easily available, or that are simply over. Which was totally generous of them to even consider, and they were totally right. This project would make a much better book if the project was finished.

Nick [uncontrollable laughter]

Erik Then there is actually value. Shortly after this I was in Korea with a friend, Sydney designer Mark Gowing of *Formist Editions,* and he was like, this is exactly my publishing model. This was maybe fall of last year and I had crossed this magic number of 1,500 pieces installed. Even then it was feeling like the project was naturally coming to an end.

Nick Perhaps this is the responsible thing to do. As a designer works to push their field, through ideas, form, space, and experimentation, there comes the point where the designer has become successful in the effort. The work is accepted and celebrated. If one is lucky enough to arrive here, it is a point of pivot. Do they continue doing what is comfortable, or do they recognize that this too must evolve? With consistency the new, the experimental can become accepted as the everyday. And while we humans love to be given what we expect, we grow far more when it's withheld and something new appears.

Erik That is right. The experimental, when successful, becomes common, at which point the experimenter must innovate. A couple years ago, I had to do some work repairing the boards so I took them down to work on in the yard. This is when I met everyone in the neighborhood. They were really upset, saying what are you doing!? Are you stopping the project?! You can't do that!? What's happening?! and I was like, don't worry, I'm just repairing the board. The project has become part of the town now, so I'm curious to see how they'll respond to it now being over [laughs].

Nick sounds like you know how they'll respond, and you are nervous.

Erik [laughs] well … I know I'm going to leave this final one up for a longer than usual.

1.   Typografika Visual Communication und Konditorei. typografika.com

2.   Ficciones Typografika Project dedicated to typographic exploration in a public space ficciones-typografika.tumblr.com

3.   Geotypografika Open-source way to exchange, share, and discuss visual communication geotypografika.com

4.   Brandt, Erik. Avatar / Papyrus, *Geotypografika* January 06/2010 geotypografika.com/ 2010/01/06/avatar-papyrus/

EXTRA ORDINARY

TALKING WITH ERIK BRANDT

Total Bombardment
of Dr. Ben Hayoun

In October of 2015, I was introduced to the practice of Dr. Nelly Ben Hayoun at the AIGA conference. It was the most explosive lecture I have ever seen, ultimately shocking the audience and changing my understanding and expectations of public talks and of design practitioners. The level of intention and difference stood out from all the other talks that weekend, that it formed a visceral connection.

As Dr. Hayoun's work aligns to my interest of public communication, I was excited to be commissioned to design work for her visit to RISD. I designed a system that embraced Dr. Hayoun's methods of chaos and total bombardment as forms of public engagement. This translated to three-levels of disruption; gravity effected falling letters, quake-contrast letters, and sliced letters.

The methodical spacing, sizing, and related angles nods to the scientific side of Hayoun's work. While she often deals with rockets, explosions and disasters, the work is highly controlled.
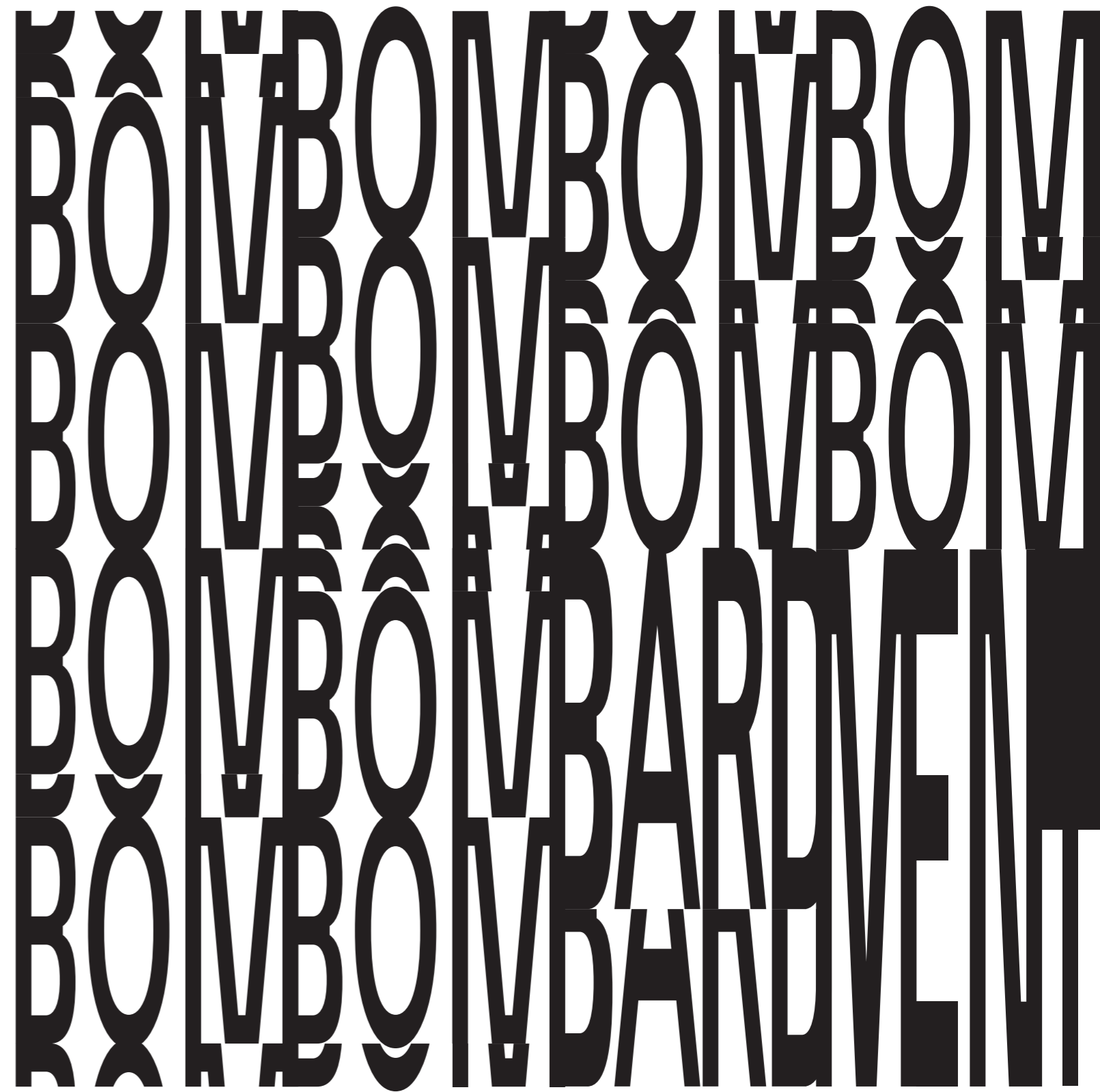
custom quake-contrast bombardment-like typographic system

MATERIAL EVIDENCE

Chaos,[1] Officialdom,[2] Sublime,[3] Space.[4]

Nelly's chaotic Designing the Impossible lecture at the 2015 AIGA Design Conference

While I do not include the research portion for most of my projects in this book, my process begins with research — seeking out inspiration directly connected to the subject or an idea of a given project. I refer to this research as material evidence. Objectively related material that I can start to base design decisions on in attempt to achieve oneness.

to contrast the chaos of her work Nelly makes use of patches to convey officialdom

NBH Studios film investigates future outer space catastrophes

1.   Dr. Nelly Ben Hayoun's practice uses chaos as a form of public engagement, inspired by French dramatist, Antonin Artaud and his Theatre of Cruelty.

2.   Countering her chaos and total bombardment practice, Nelly's use of titles and her partner organization's logos creates an air of officialdom that helps bring the impossible to life.

3.   Her practice delivers extreme experiences to members of the public, to give them access to the sublime of science.

4.   Nelly's largest projects investigate outer-space in terms of travel, disasters, and the potential for human colonization.

TOTAL
TOTAL
TOTAL
TOTAL
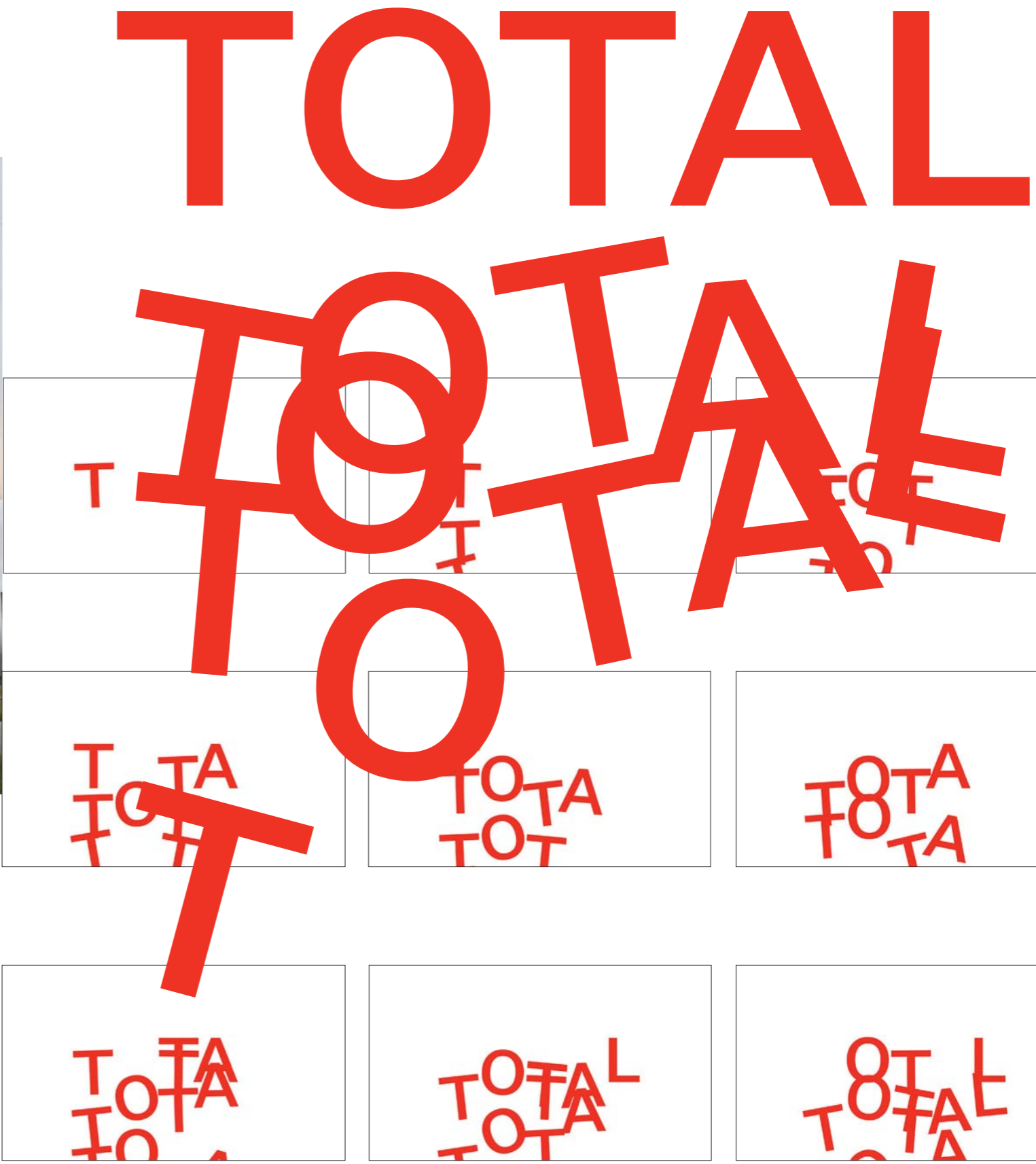
the design maneuvers were based on the countdown and combustion reaction of a rocket launch

1×
1×
1×
2×
2×
2×
3×
3×
3×

BOM
BARD
MENT

3×
2×
1×
1×
1×
2×
3×
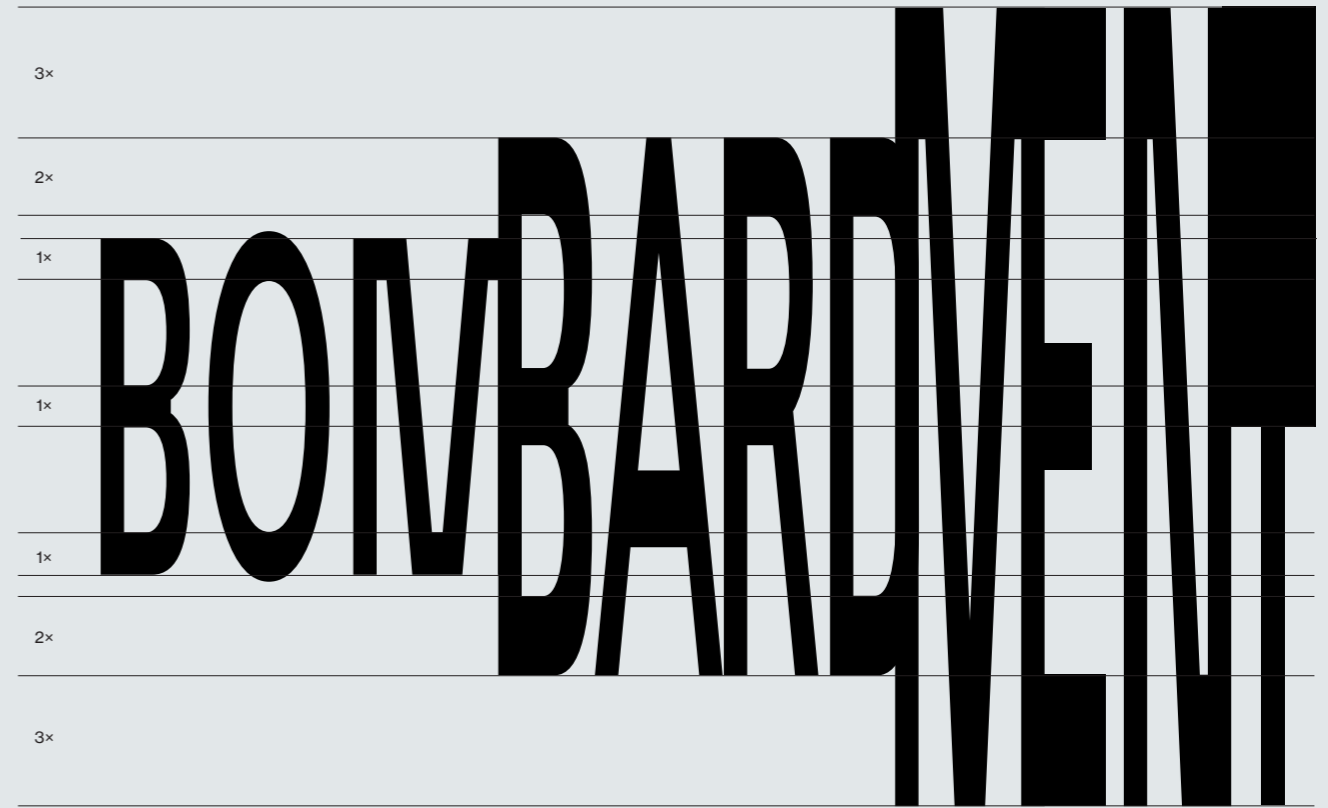
BOMBARDMENT

the typographic bombardment system has letters designed at three different horizontal stresses

BOM
BOM BARD VEN
BARD VEN T
MEN
MEN T

BON BARD VEN
BON BARD VEN
T

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK EXTRA ORDINARY TOTAL BOMBARDMENT
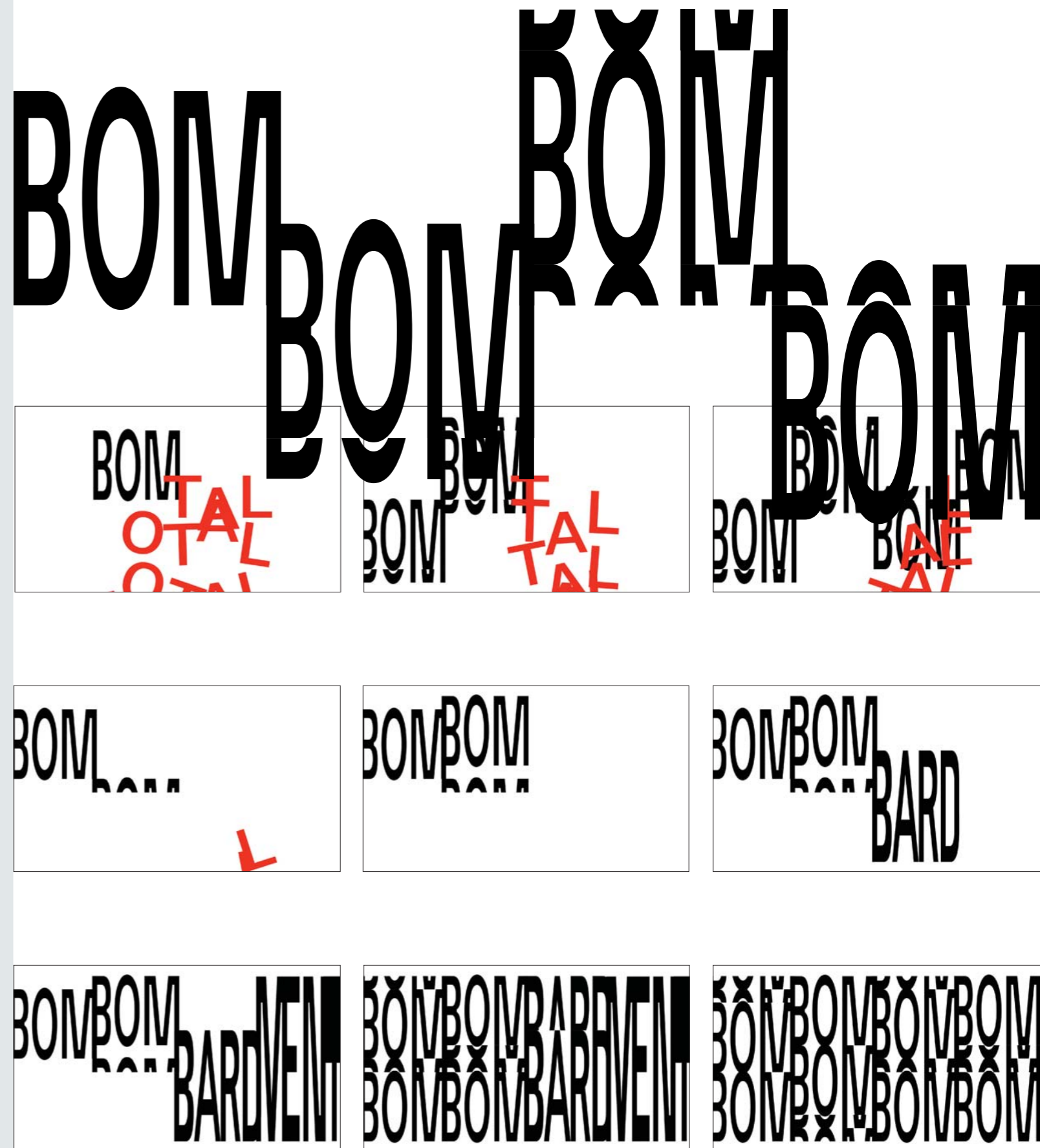
this these frames bringing the two typographic, time-based systems together

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK   EXTRA ORDINARY   TOTAL BOMBARDMENT

flipping from this page to the previous you can see the system animating

BOM BOM BOM BOM
BOMBARDMENT
BOM BOM BOM
ROI

EXTRA ORDINARY   TOTAL BOMBARDMENT

BOMBOMBOMBOMBOMBOMBOM
BOMBOMBOMBOMBOMBOM

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK   EXTRA ORDINARY   TOTAL BOMBARDMENT

BOMBOMBOMBARDMEN
BOMBOMBOMBARDMEN

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK EXTRA ORDINARY TOTAL BOMBARDMENT
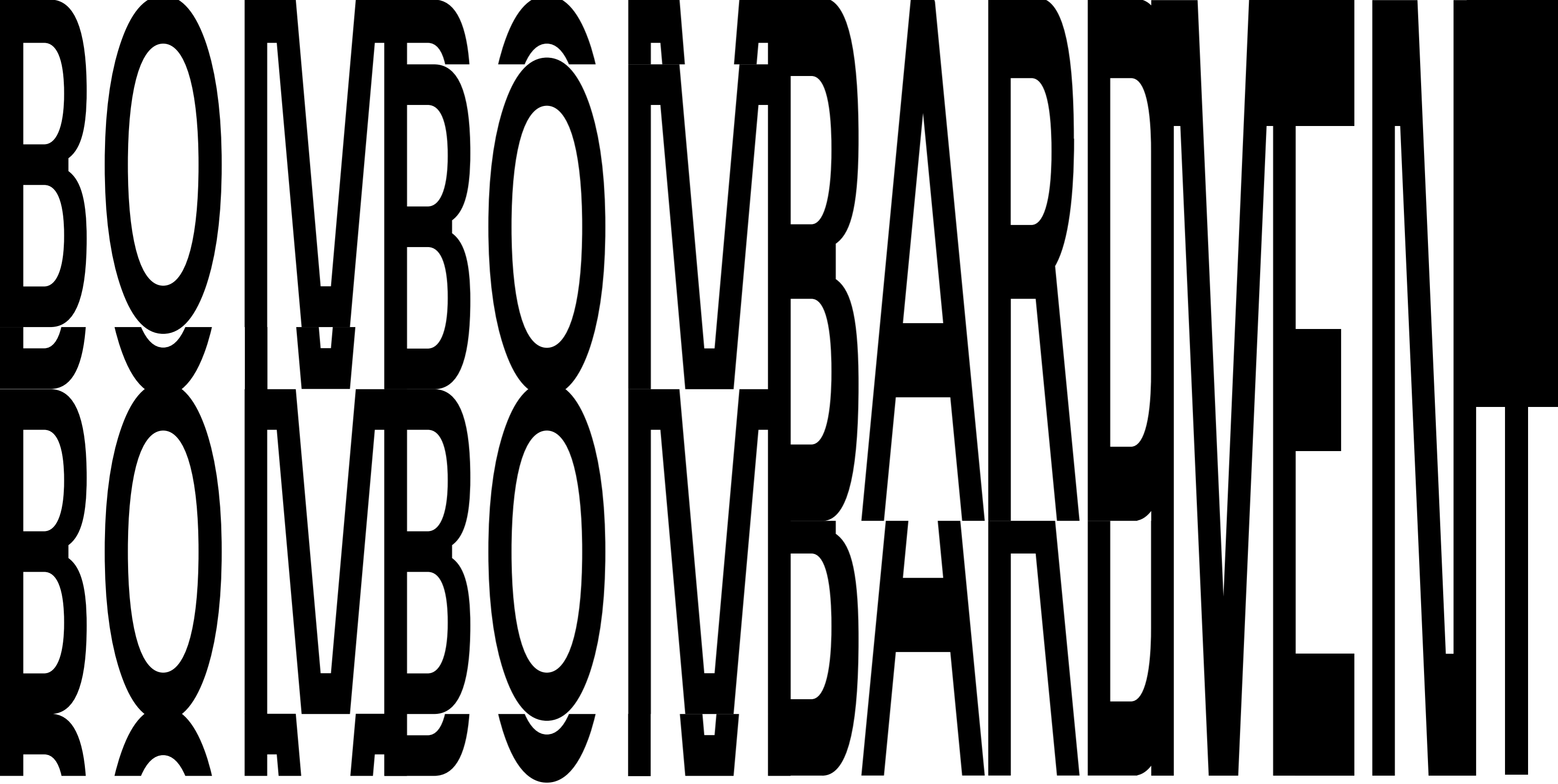
CHAOS

'chaos' is set in my custom typeface *Uniform*
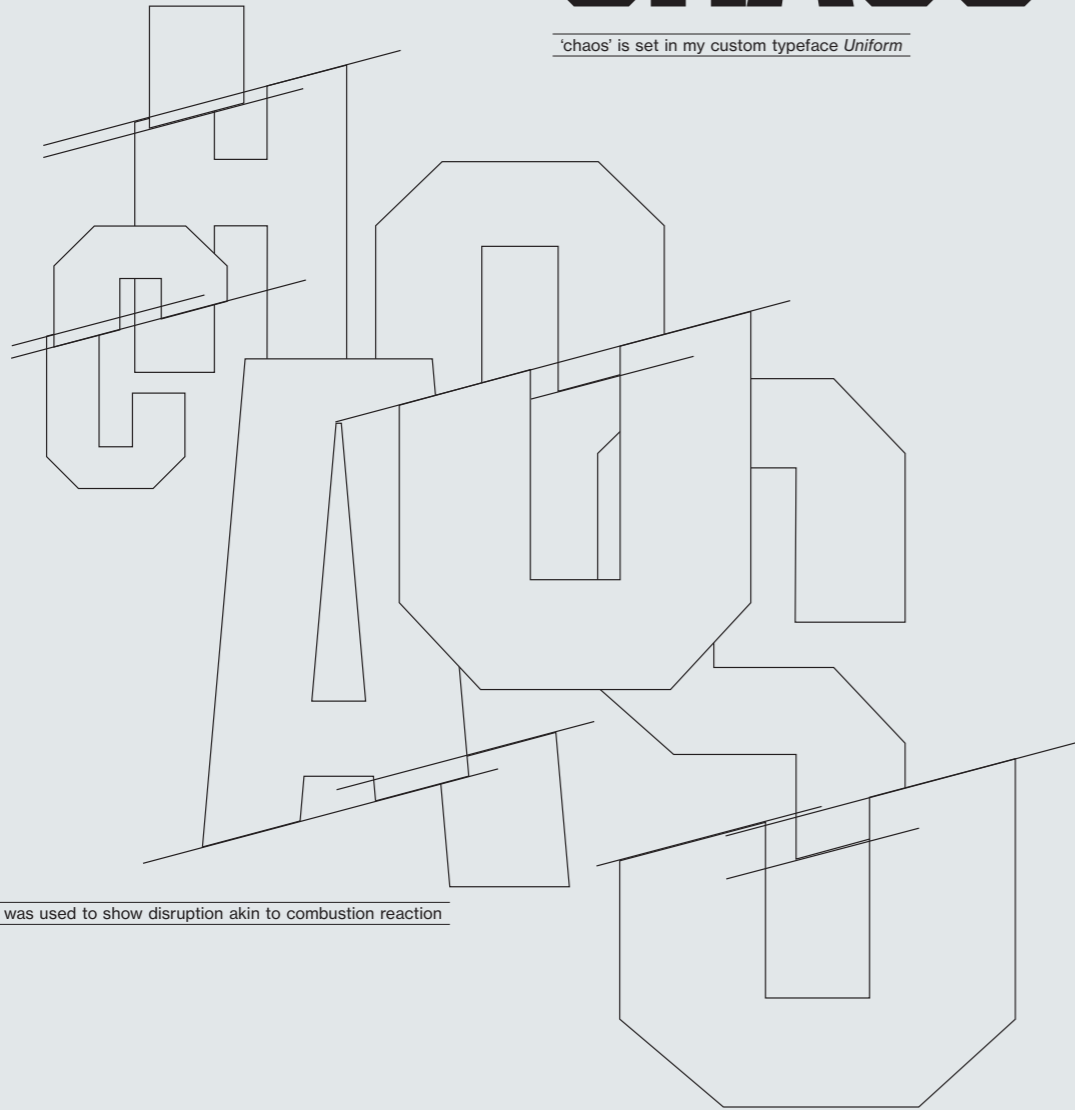
a 15˚ angle was used to show disruption akin to combustion reaction

RISD
GRAPHIC DESIGN
MFA PROGRAM
VISITING DESIGNER LECTURE

this angle then informed how the type would be set

Nelly often wears logos of the organizations she works for

the badges and letters interweave with each other
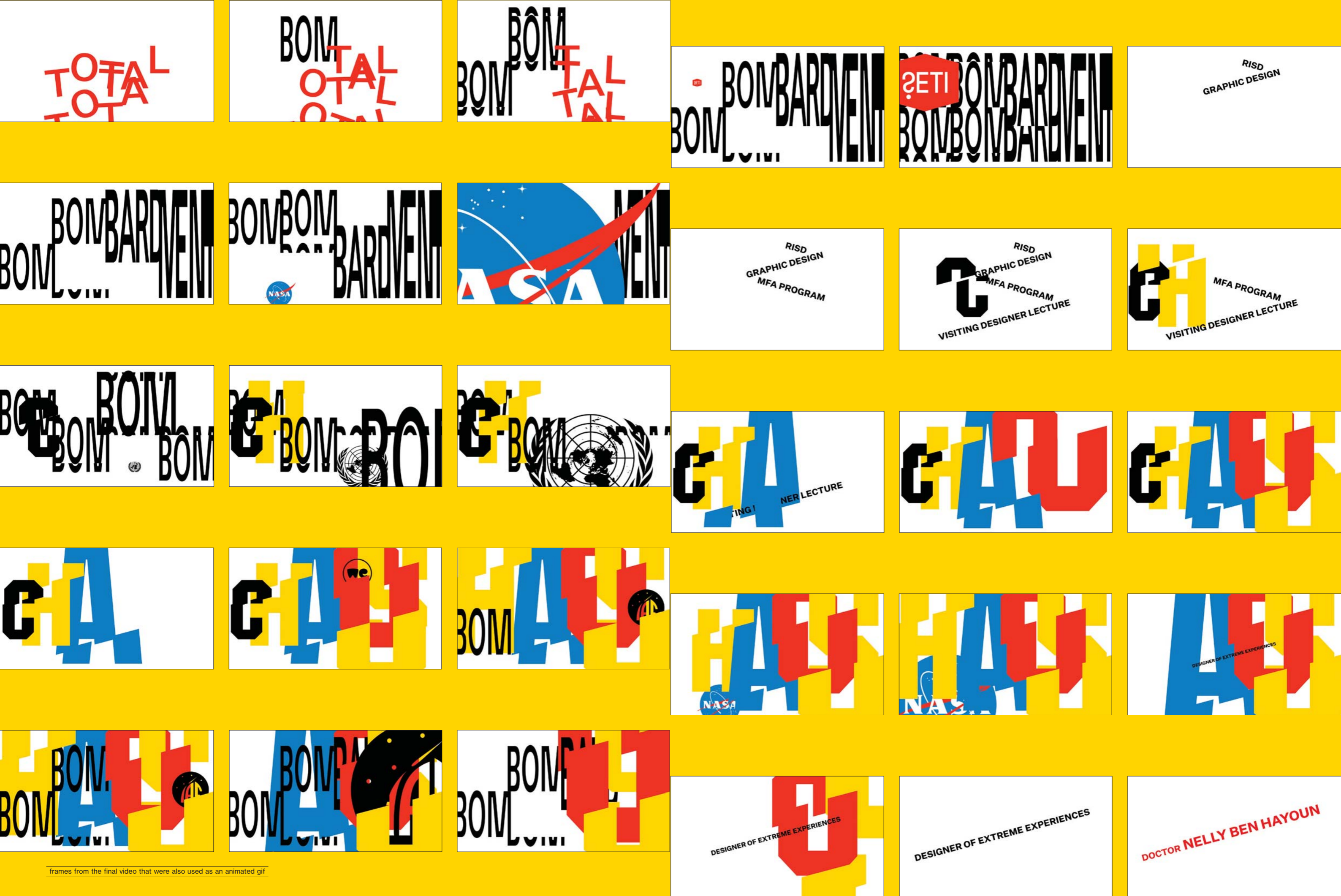
frames from the final video that were also used as an animated gif
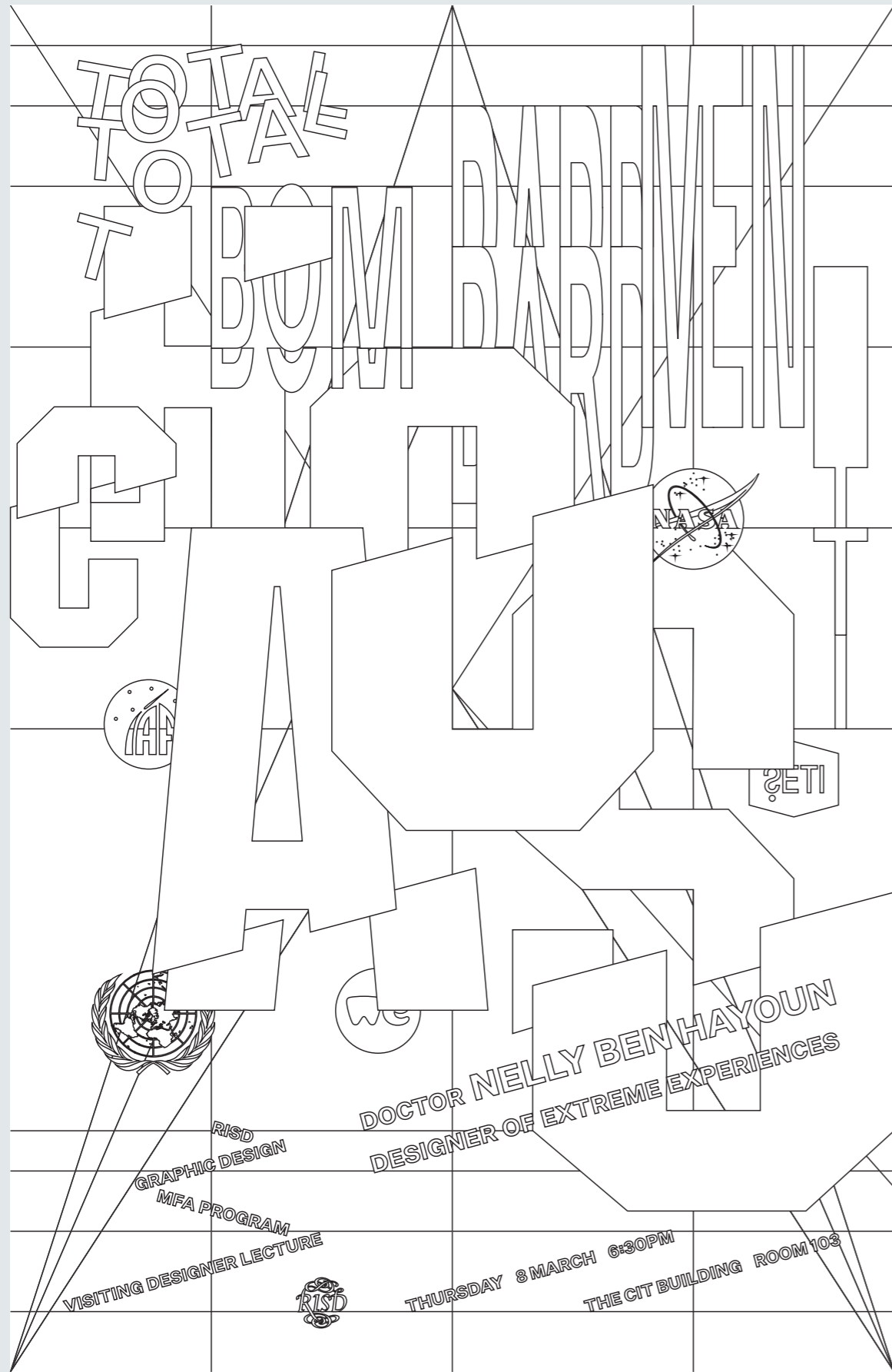
alignment grid demonstrating the rocket-launch-like energy I was attempting to put in
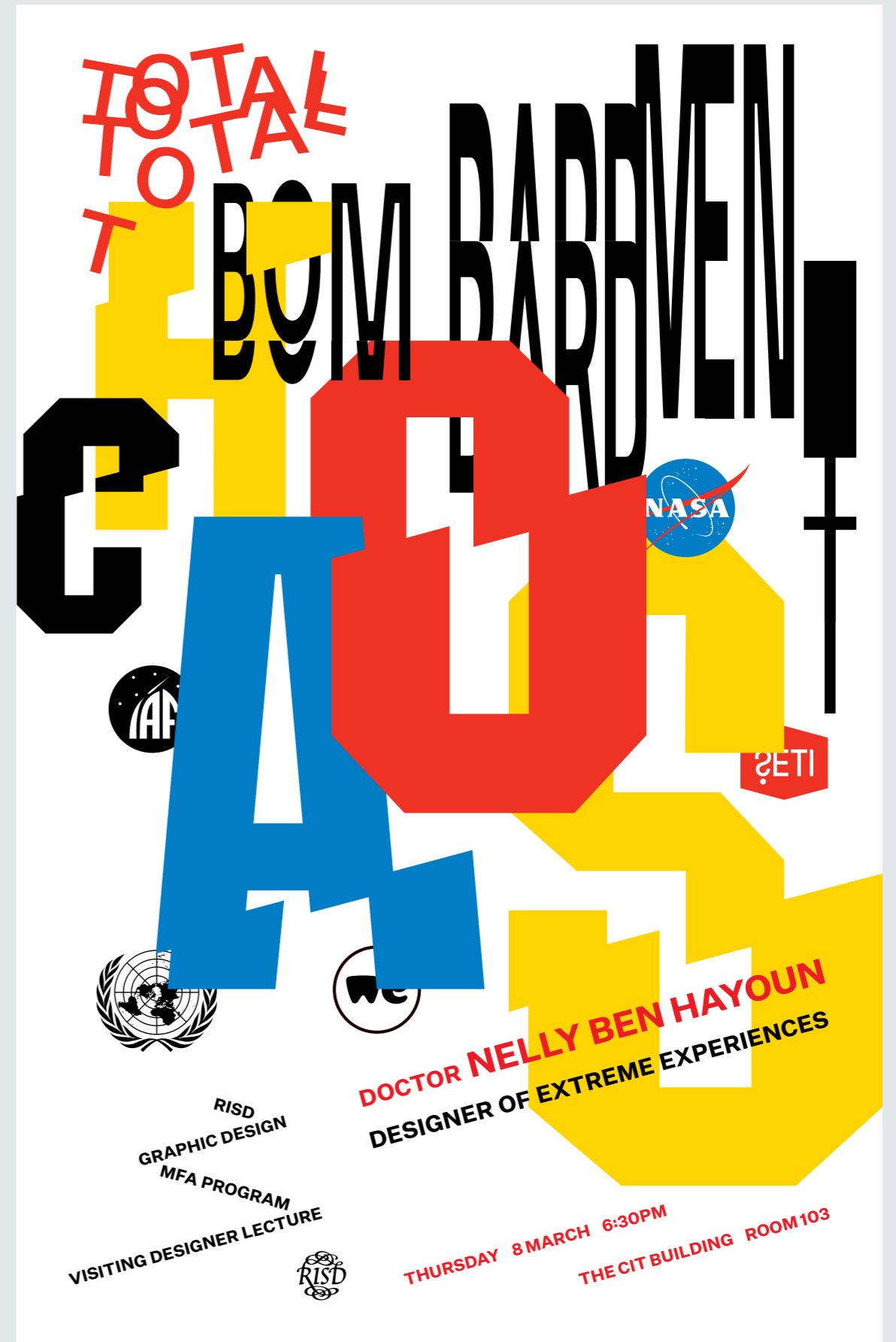
final weltformat poster 90 × 128 cm

Radically Real Dimension

Throughout each of my projects I'm working to bring some type of found reality into form. This often means sketching, drawing, and building new letters, typefaces, tools and softwares rather than relying on filters, effects, templates, or other preimagined tools. While I've use *Rhino* and *Cinema4d,* and I enjoy them, they tend to produce things that look hyper-real, artificial, or just slightly off. This brought about an interest in real dimension and its effects on letterforms for this 1-hour project.

Purchasing a set of standard mailbox letter stickers from a hardware store, I positioned the letters in different angles then photographed them with my phone. I began with 'R' and noticed the relationship of rounding and blurring things that were further away and out of focus. It felt like the photographed 'R' was charging forward.

To embrace this further I selected a word that felt dimensional by definition: 'RUN'. The goal became to study and photograph these letters from every angle possible. Then to take the assets and attempt to produce multiple settings of the word that would each feel like a different type of running.

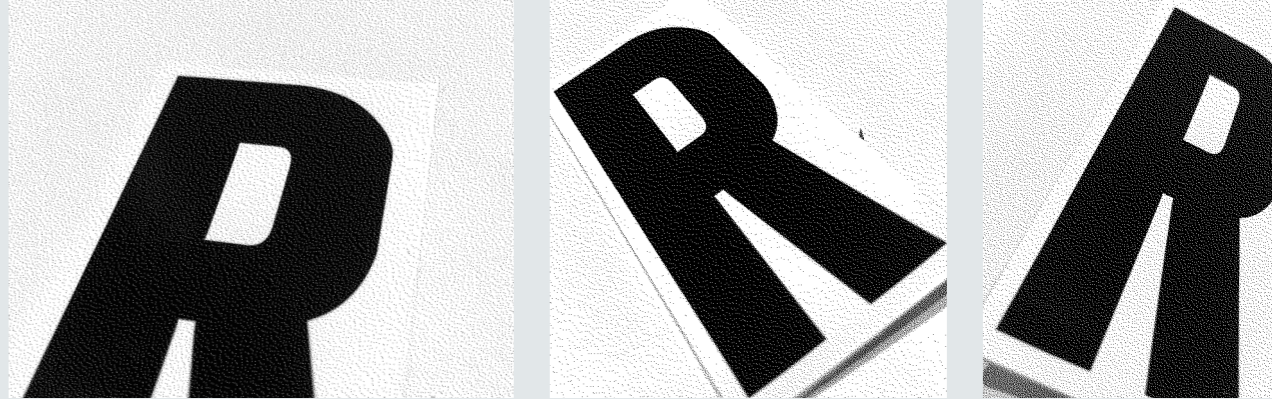Letter 'R' extracted from photograph

AAAA
BBCC
DDEE

KLLMEFFG
MNNNGHHJ
OOOOIIIJK

2 Hy-Ko brand black and white vinyl letters

letter 'R' positioned at different angles, photographed with cellphone

PPQRWWXX
RSSTYYZ&
TUUV@=:!

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK EXTRA ORDINARY RADICALLY REAL DIMENSION

dimensional 'R' extracted from photograph

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

EXTRA ORDINARY

RADICALLY REAL DIMENSION

EXTRA ORDINARY

RADICALLY REAL DIMENSION
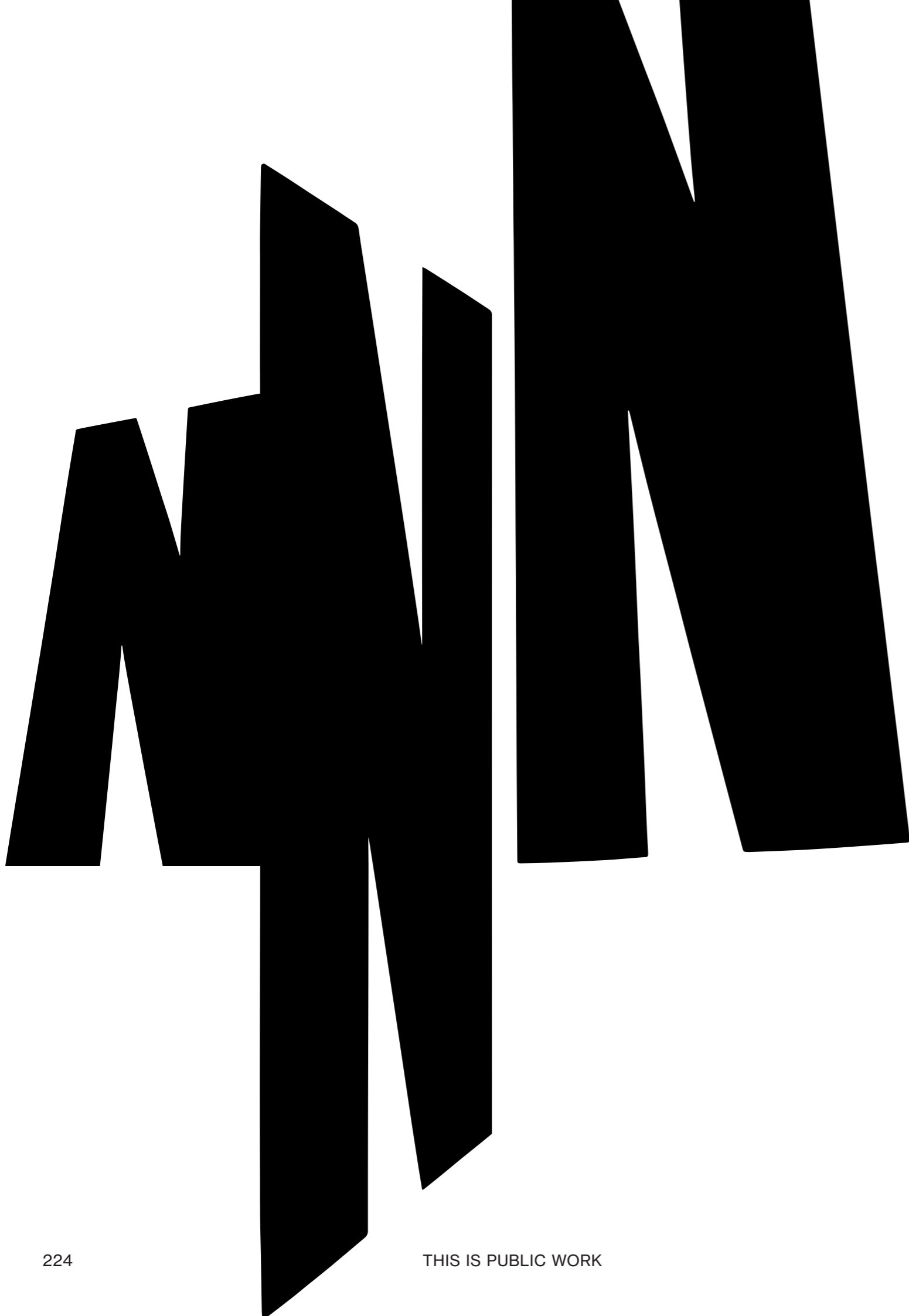
poster 1   21" × 30"—the color and setting is inteded to feel celebratory and community-based

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

EXTRA ORDINARY

RADICALLY REAL DIMENSION

poster 2   21" × 30"—this composition is intended to feel more aggressive

poster 3   21" × 30"—the final poster in the series focused on conveying explosive energy

detail from poster 1

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

EXTRA ORDINARY

RADICALLY REAL DIMENSION

EXTRA ORDINARY

detail from poster 3

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

EXTRA ORDINARY

RADICALLY REAL DIMENSION

Dimensional Composing Room

Although my previous project, *Radically Real Dimension* attempted to personify real dimension, the execution was still an abstraction. The project, extracting the letters, and then composing them, did not exactly live up to its name.

Wanting to take the idea further, I built a composing room within a light box. I then prompted members of the graduate studio to think of a dimensional word and set it dimensionally. I encouraged my cohort to define dimensionality in term and form however it might be appropriate for them.

This dimensional composing room was outfitted within a 3' × 3' photography lighting cube. The top and bottom had pegboards cut to size and resting on the framework of the box. The pegboards allowed dowel rods to hold their position at any angle. The camera settings were adjusted to blow-out the photograph so the final image would retain solely the letterforms.

Jenn Livermore setting type in the Composing Room

Hy-Ko sticker letters were also used in this study
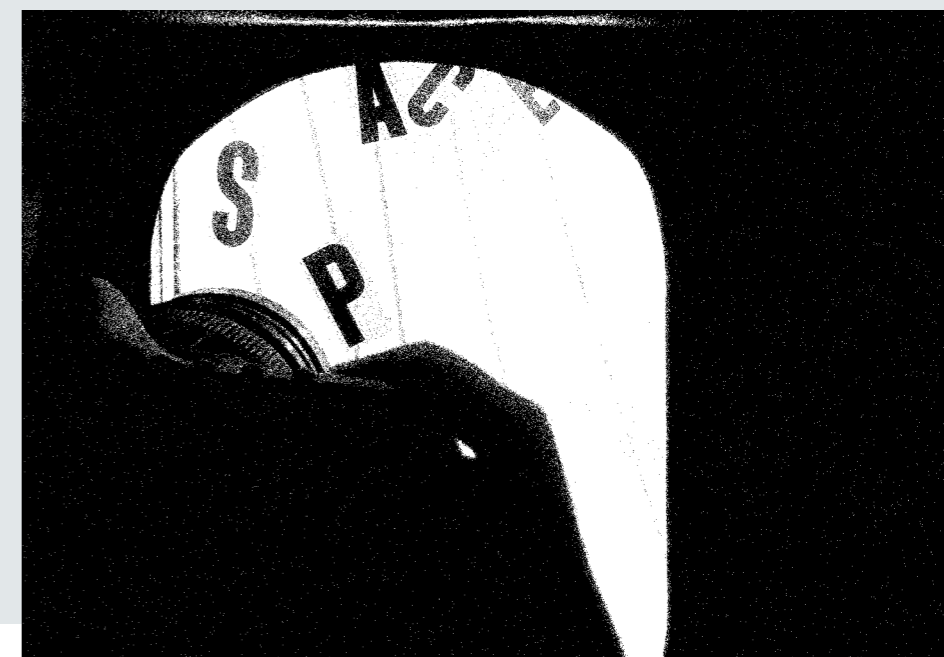
from outside the Composing Room

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

EXTRA ORDINARY

DIMENSIONAL COMPOSING ROOM

participants would think of a dimensional word, then affix the letters to dowels

within the Composing Room, participants would set their word in a manner that expressed their intended motion or emotion

the camera was set to blow-out the image so the photograph would only contain the letterforms, not the dowels or edges
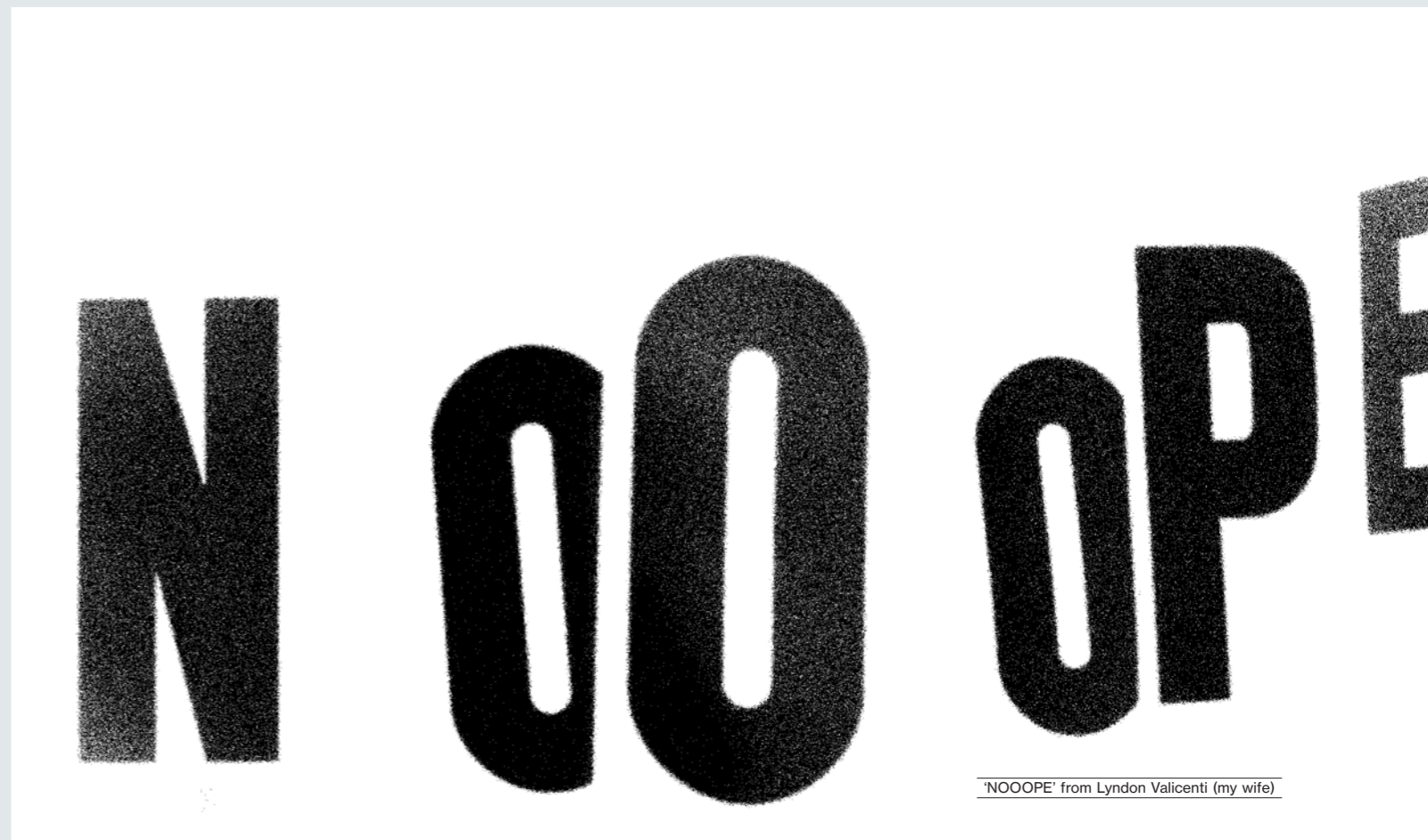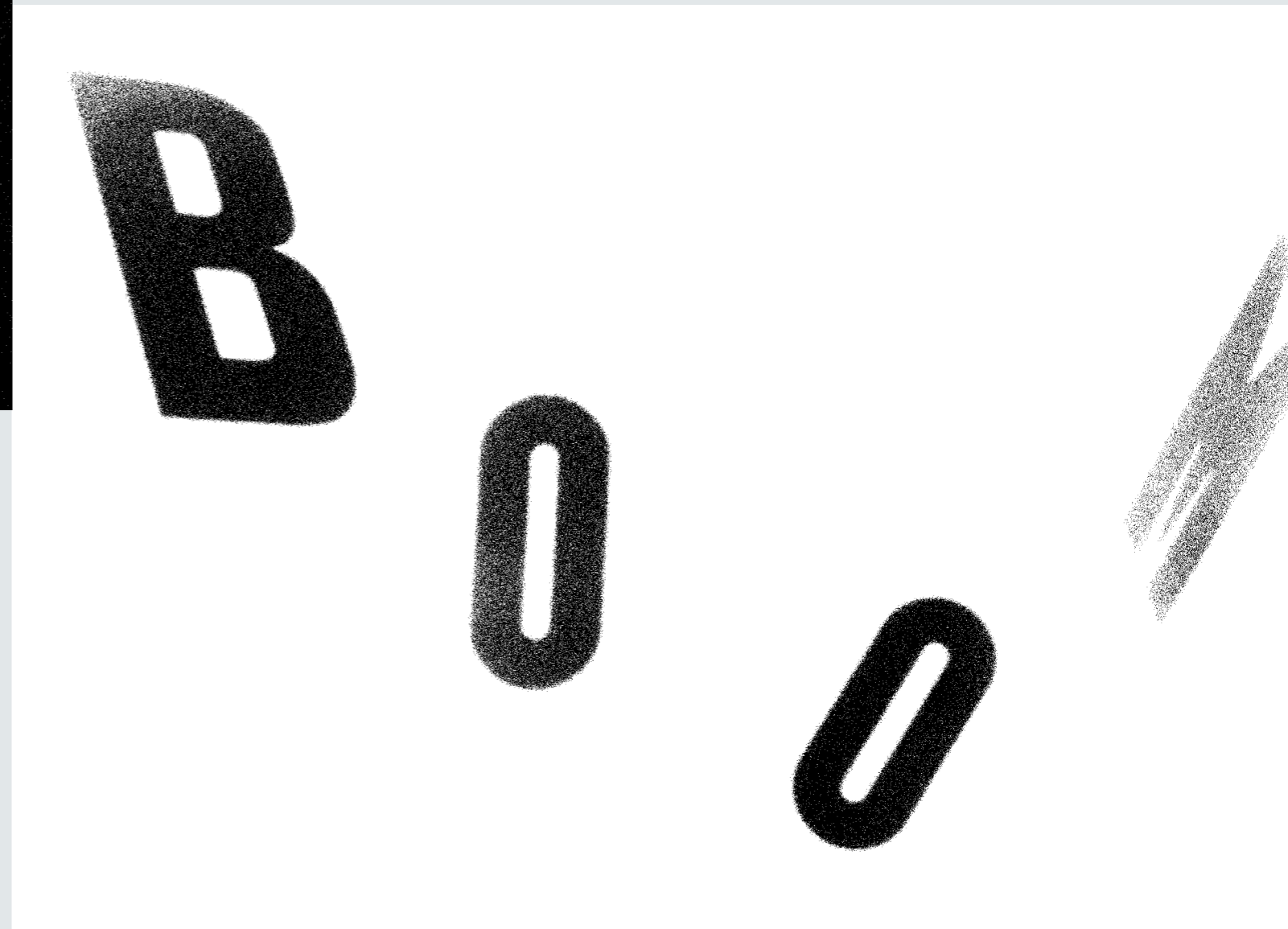

'NOOOPE' from Lyndon Valicenti (my wife)

the dowels allow the participant composer to set type vertically, horizontally, and diagonally, while the Composing Room provide the ability to use depth

Wei-Hao Wang setting his type

'BOOM' as set by Wei-Hao Wang

As the camera blows out the dowel rods it also produces a grain effect

'FAR' as set by Brandon Olsen
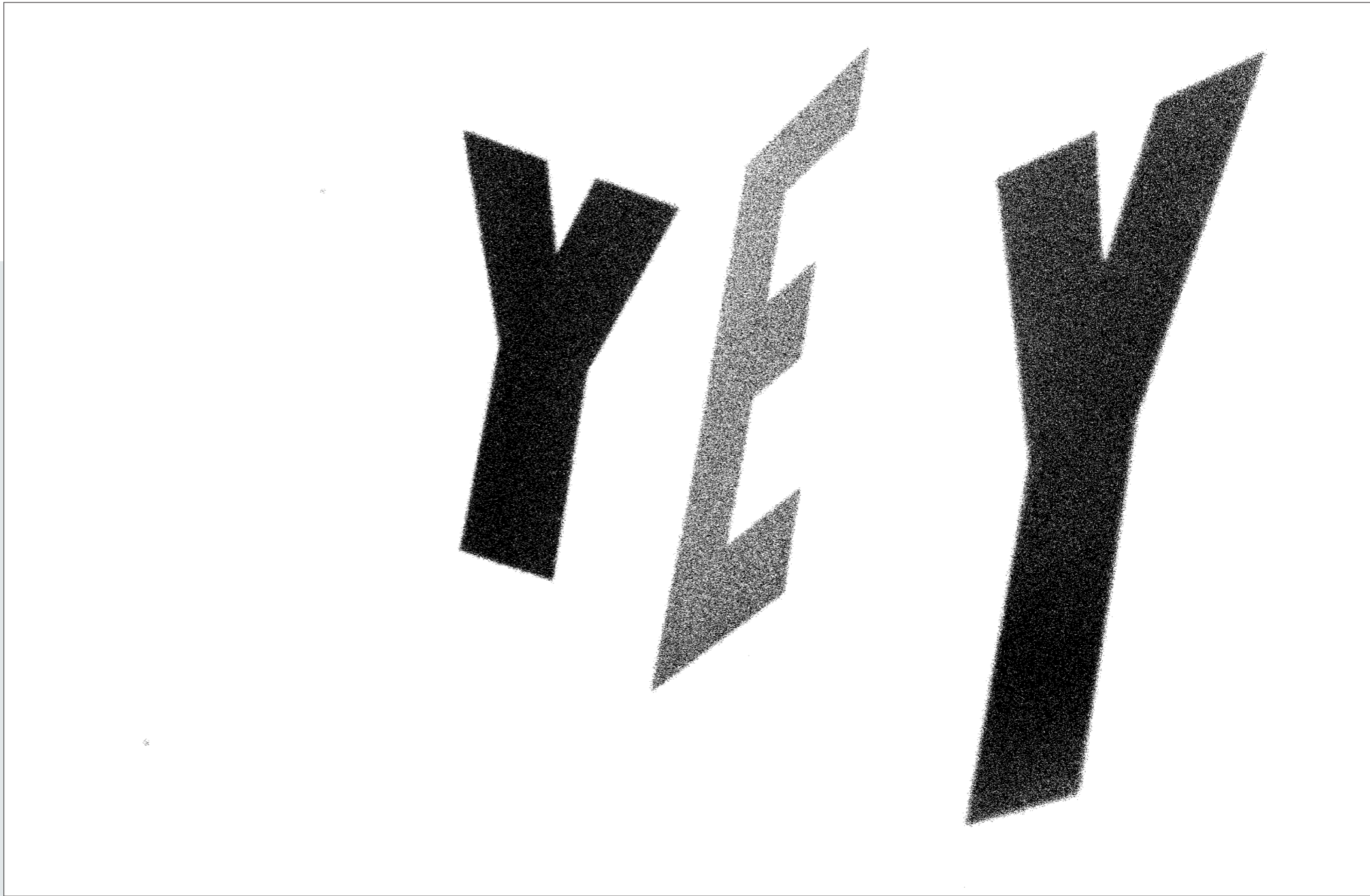
'YEY' set by Maria Rull Besos

Visual Poetics

A design inspiration of mine, Zach Lieberman, was coming to RISD to give a public lecture and host a workshop part of the Visiting Designer series. Commissioned to design graphics for the events, I was excited, but where to begin? Lieberman's work is like explorations into new, uncharted universes. His dimensional, animated constructions, defy reality while embodying the spirit of life.

I focused on his conceptual and formal qualities, to create experimental form and transformation from computation. Lieberman describes this as visual poetics. The work I designed embraces his philosophical idea and exploration of vibrant depth. The typographic dimensionality of Zach's name on the poster extends off the structural elements of these letterforms, to float in z-space based on a one-point perspective.
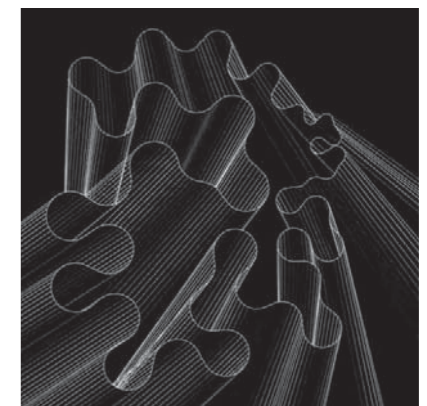
The one-point perspective offers a tactical poster installation instruction: centering at eye-level, making installation easy and purposeful. An eye-level hanging allows the one-point perspective to operate optically fulfilling the illusion of depth.
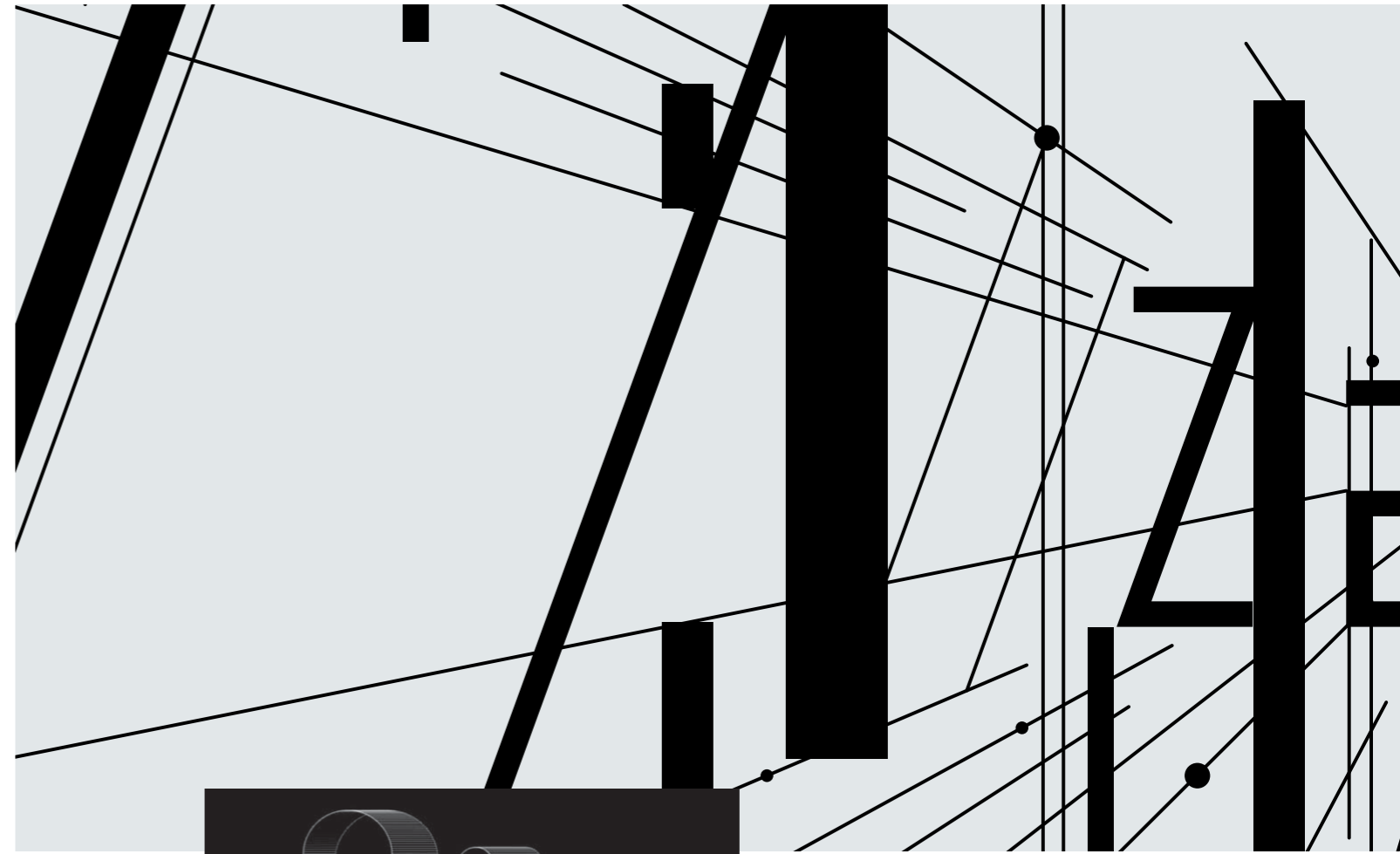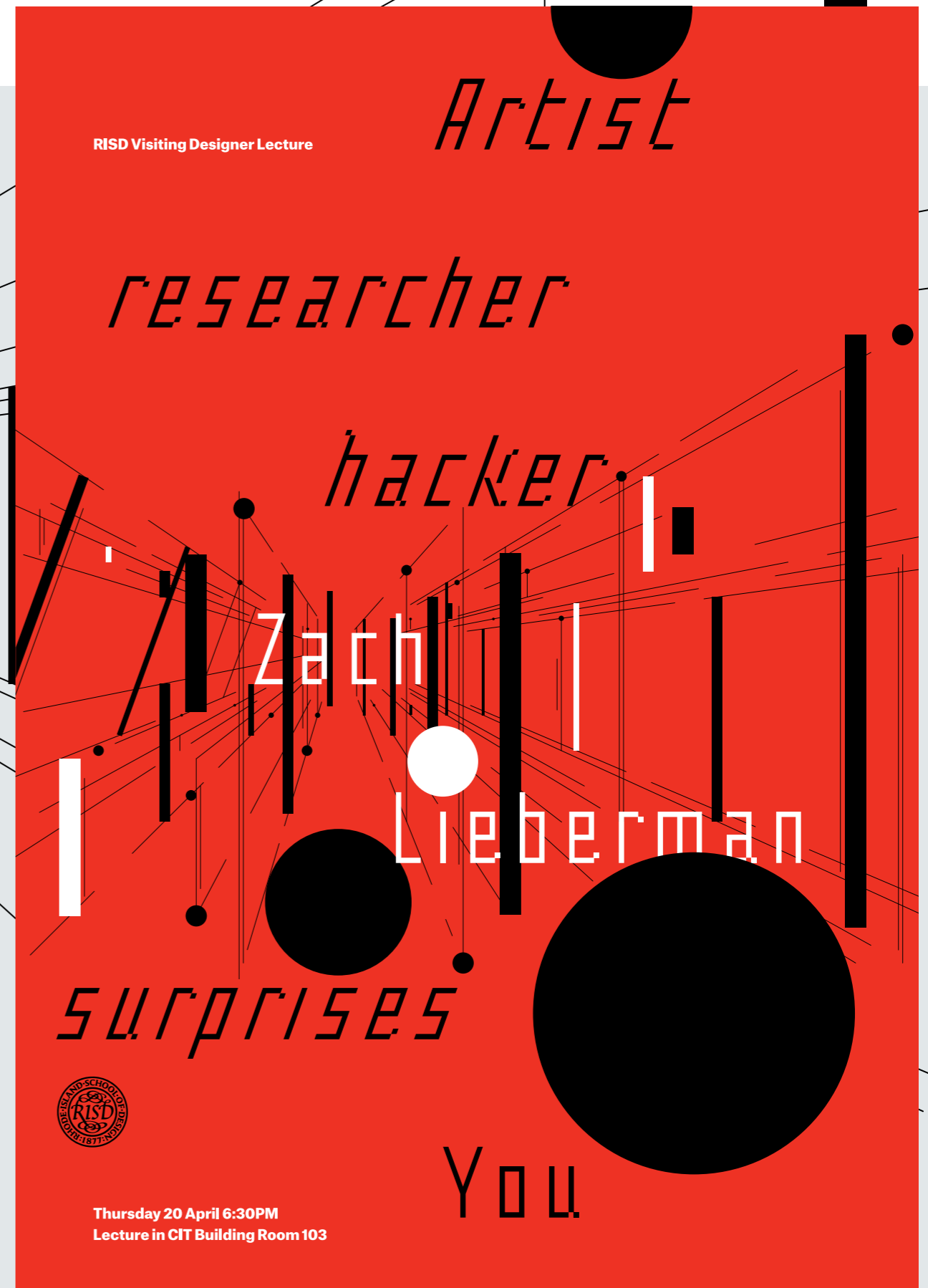
detail of my design work made for Lieberman's visit

reference images of Lieberman's work

a Fibonacci sequence is used to determine size and weight, creating an optical truthfulness to the dimension

RISD Visiting Designer Lecture

Artist
researcher
hacker
Zach
Lieberman
surprises
You

Thursday 20 April 6:30PM
Lecture in CIT Building Room 103

60cm × 128 cm weltformat poster

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

EXTRA ORDINARY

VISUAL POETICS

Artist

researcher

hacker

Zach

Lieberman

surprises

RISD

Thursday 20 April 6:30PM
Lecture in CIT Building Room 103

You

the copy was adapted from Lieberman's bio—designed to align horizontally, vertically, and diagonally across each letterform

Zach

hacker

the letterforms were designed for this piece based on 1 × 1 units, and the italic is drawn from the diagonal of the 'Z'

A Letter that Moves
openFramework

Have you ever seen Zach Lieberman's Instagram?
Or his Medium articles where he shares his daily
computation sketches? Lieberman built a coding
and rendering platform called *openFrameworks,*
where all of this work takes place. He visited
RISD to introduce us to this way of working.
This exploration of form and technology took place
within *openFrameworks* and allowed me
to think of a designed form's potential states
with respect to responsiveness. How might
a form project its awareness of its public?
Historically, this relates to the portrait artists'
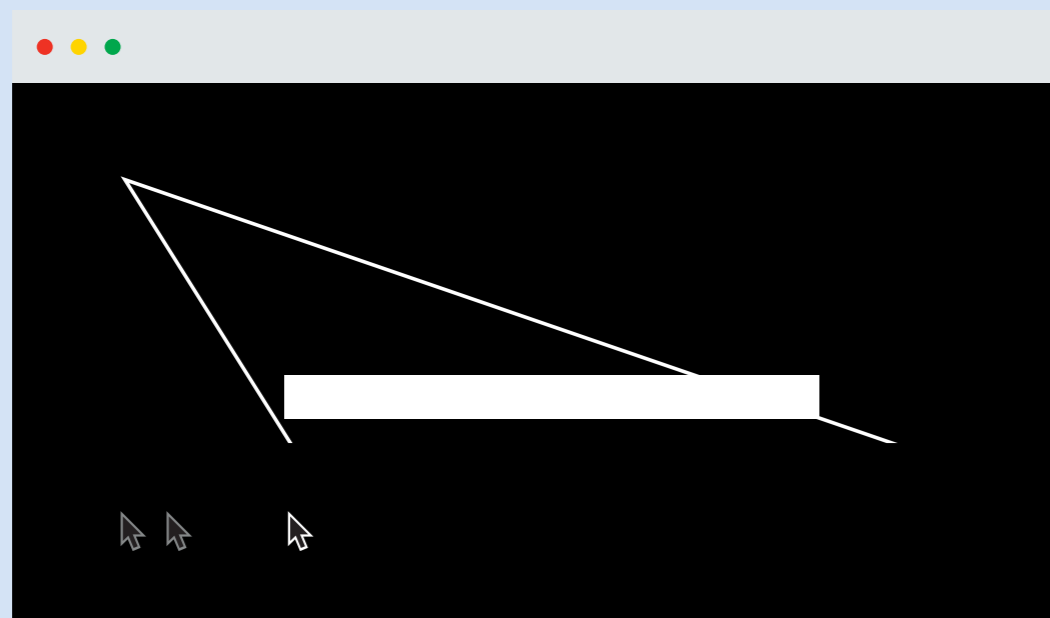ability to render eyes that seem to follow viewers.

resting state of the high-contrast, geometric, slant uppercase 'A'
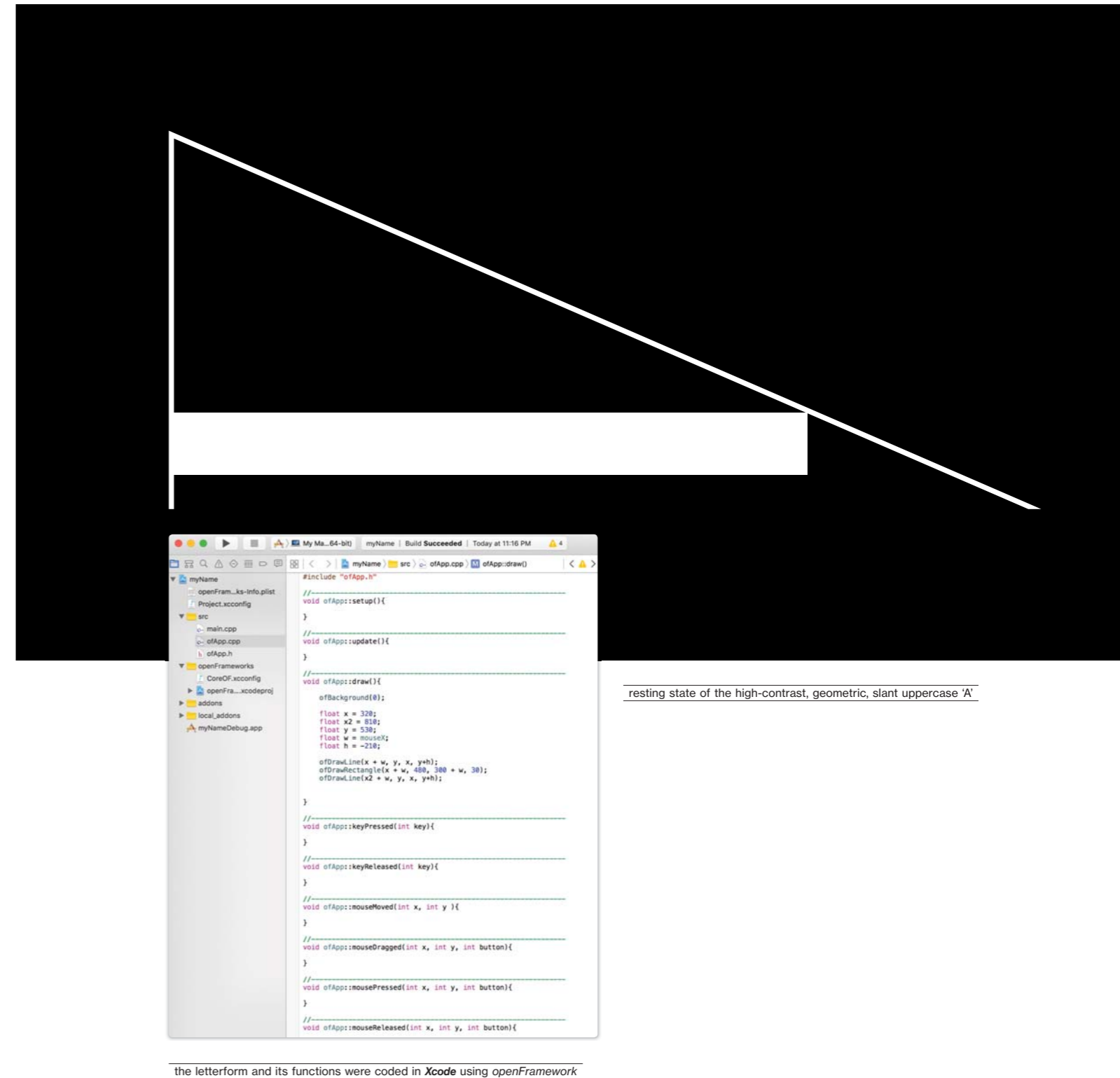
the letterform and its functions were coded in *Xcode* using *openFramework*
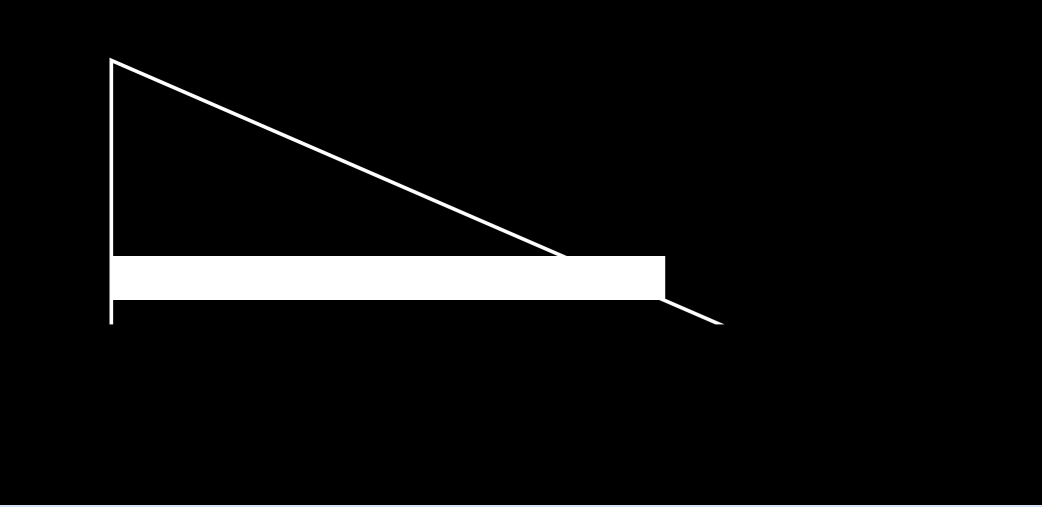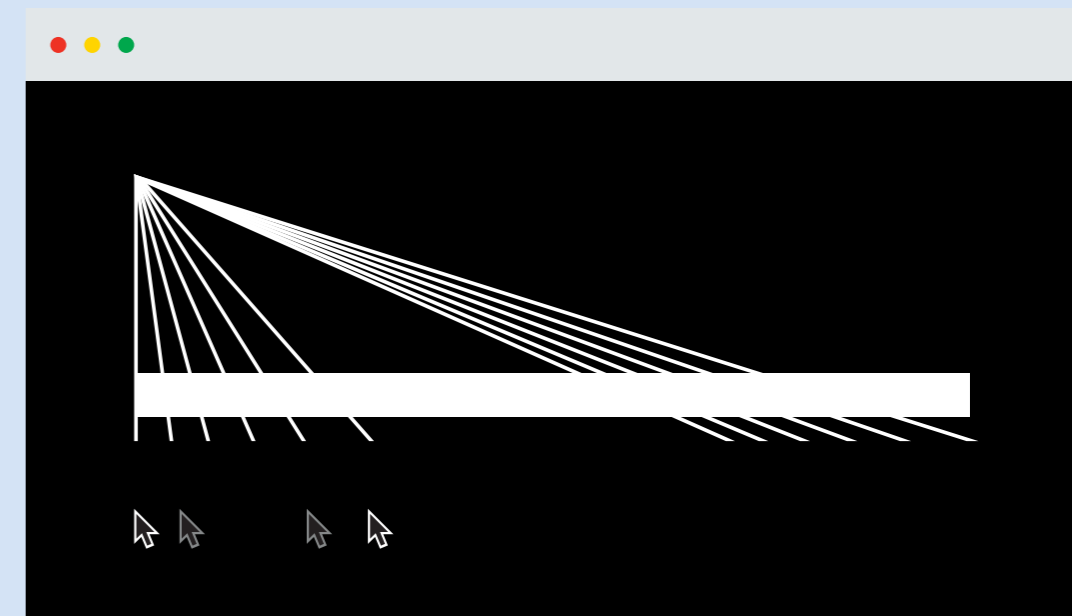
uppercase 'A' in its resting-state
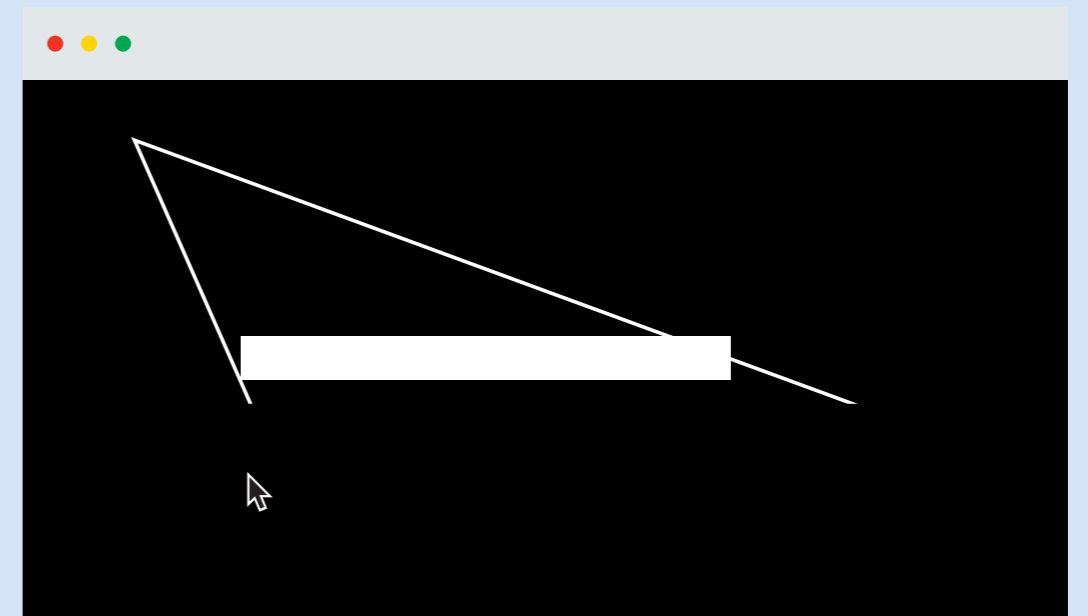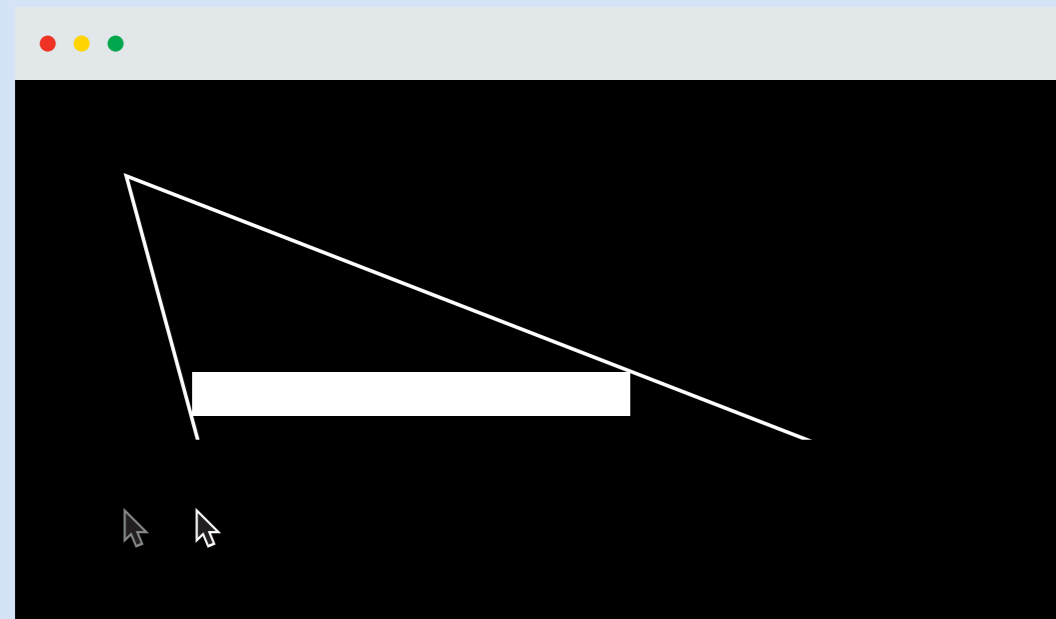
the letterform's apex (top of the 'A') maintains a fixed position while all the other parts follow the cursor


as a cursor enters the frame and continues to move, the feet and cross bar become animated

Infinitely Veritable

It is an extremely exciting time to be a designer. Our ever-growing access to information, tools, and technology allows designers to work in nearly any facet that they can imagine. My inherent interestin lettering, type design and letter customization has me excited about possible new ways of working, thinking, and communica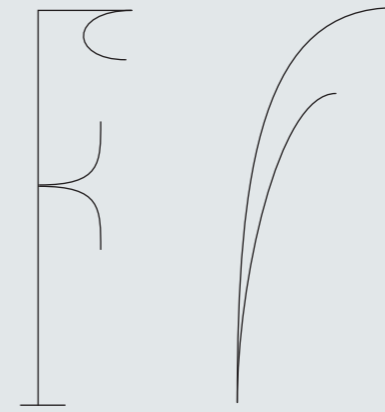ting using Variable Fonts technology. *Alphe* is the speculative typeface I have drawn, thinking about widening the scope of variability. Mapping out complex transitions and programmatic settings, *Alphe* morphs across weight, size, style, color, contextual awareness and structural adaptation. The high-character style of *Alphe's* letterforms emphasizes the fun and play that is possible for designers now.
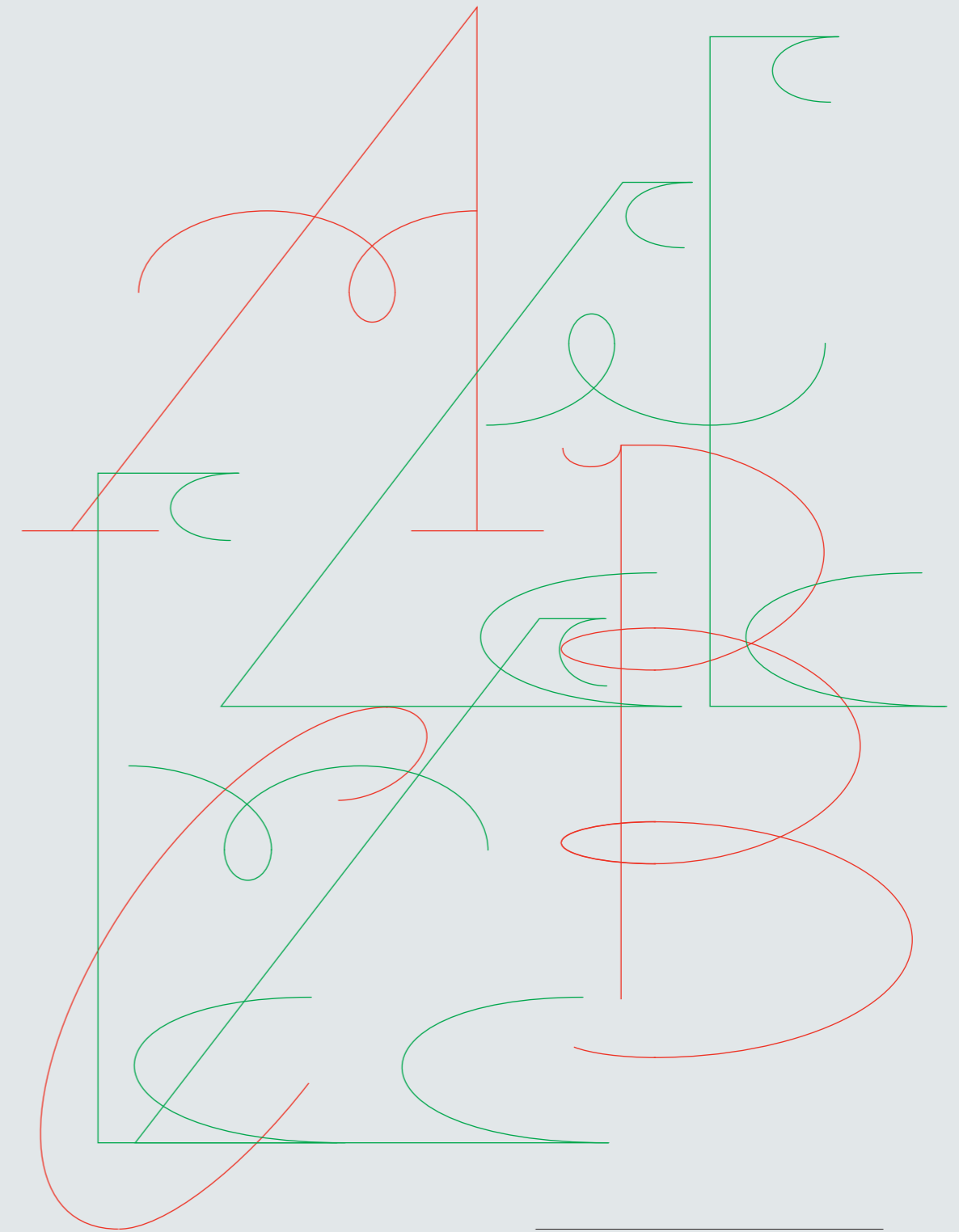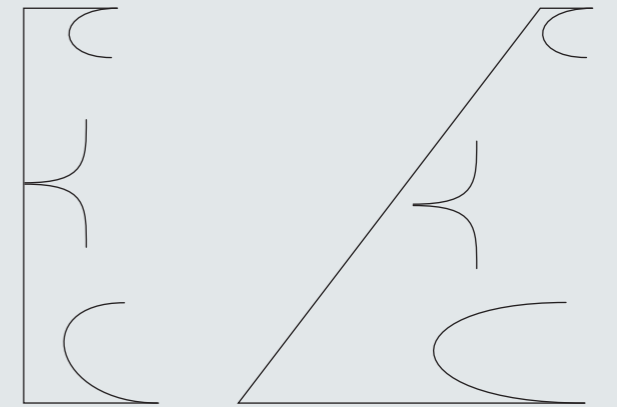

'ABC' and four different 'E' set in 300pt, hairline *Alphe*

ABCDEF

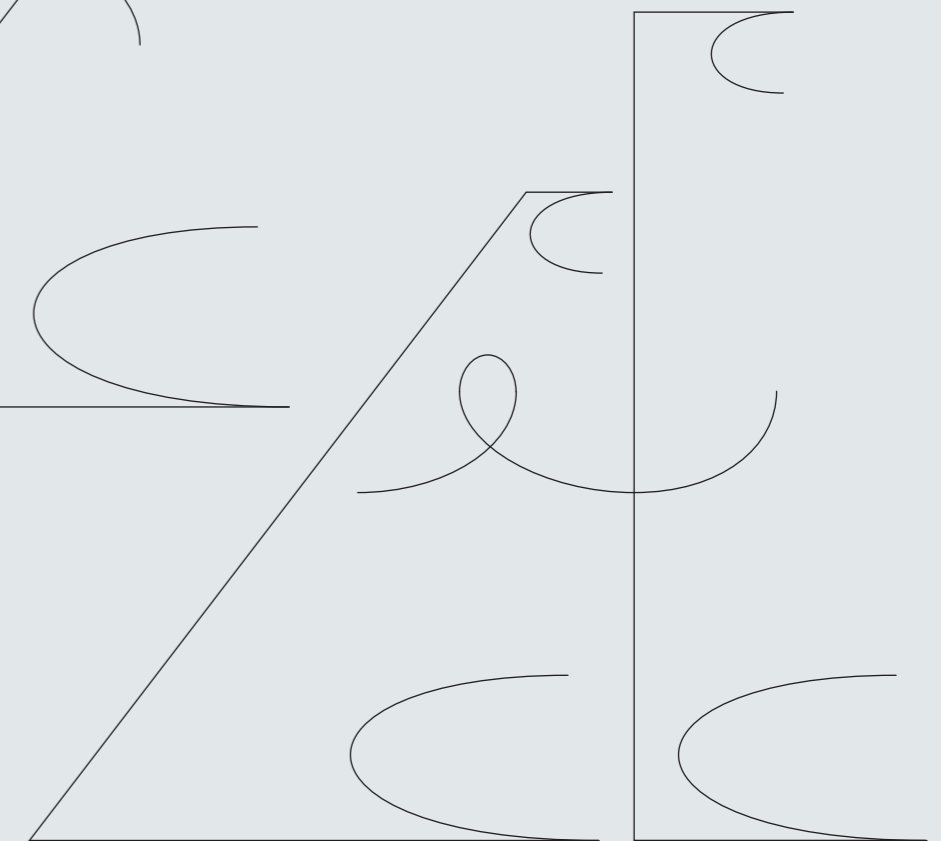100pt *Alphe* set in hairline-wieght with regular characters

ACE

200pt hairline *Alphe* transitions into oblique alternate setting

ACE

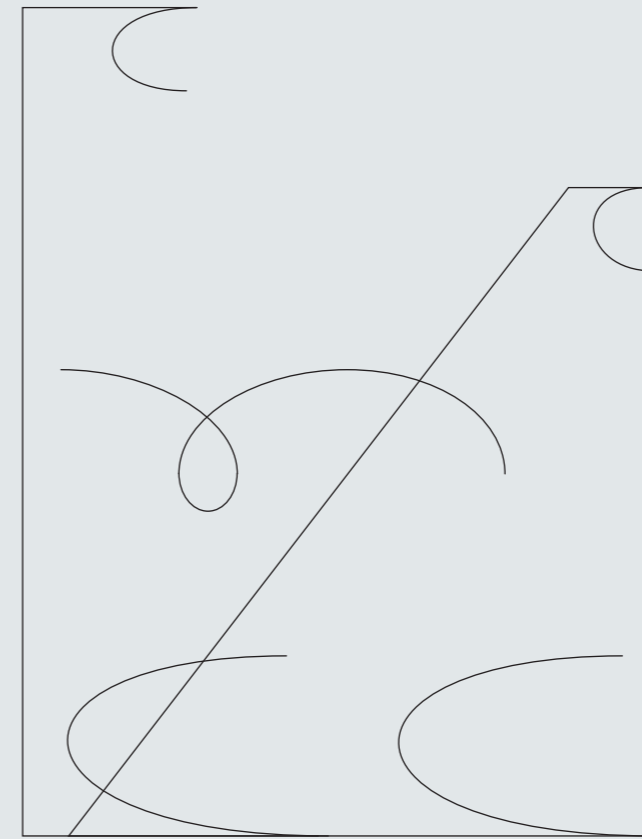200pt *Alphe* obliques in a recurrent sequence maintaining hairline weight

Fr

alternates that can be stylistic or contextual

ERR

the alternate styles are not different forms, they are transitional states

EZE

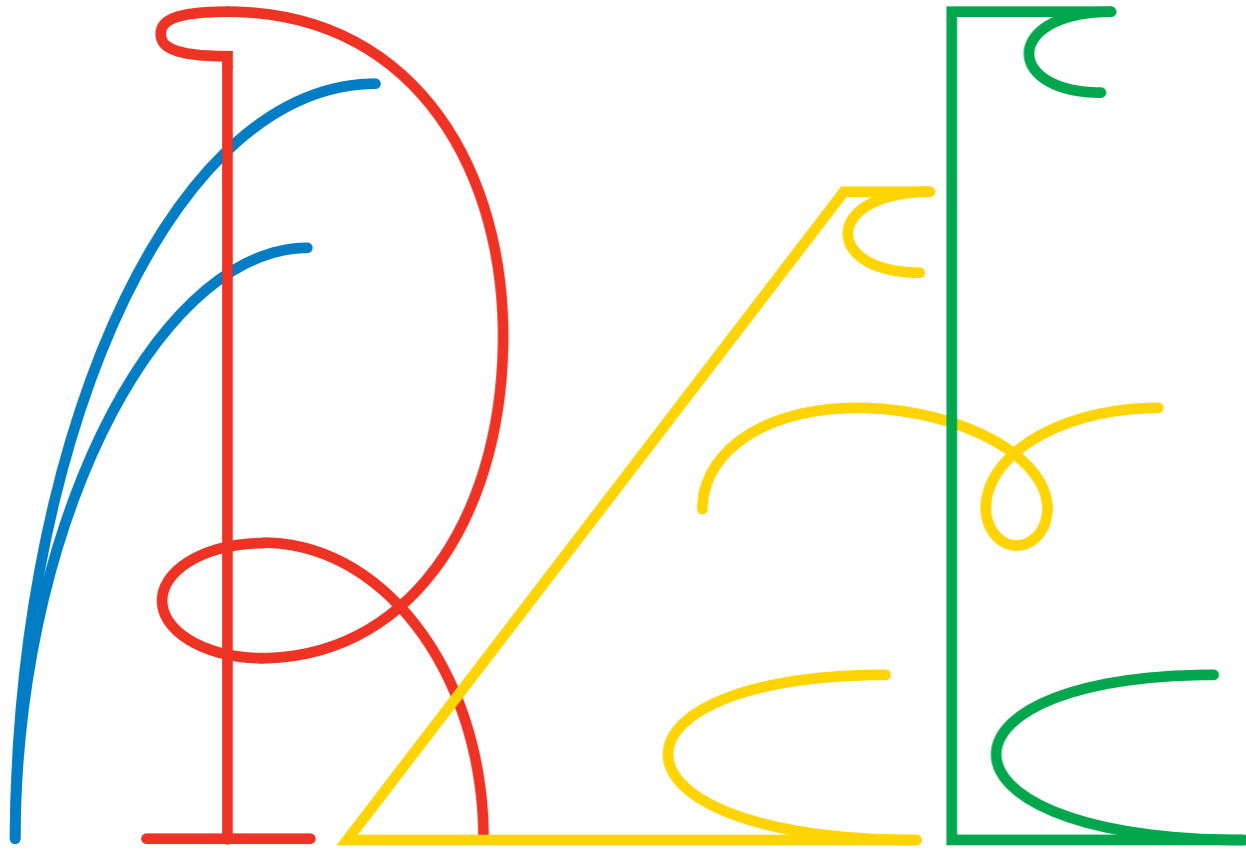contextual pairings transition across stance, size, and structure at once

'free' set in 400pt *Alphe* with 6pt weighting and contextual small–large alternates

'pizza' set with contextual large–small alternates
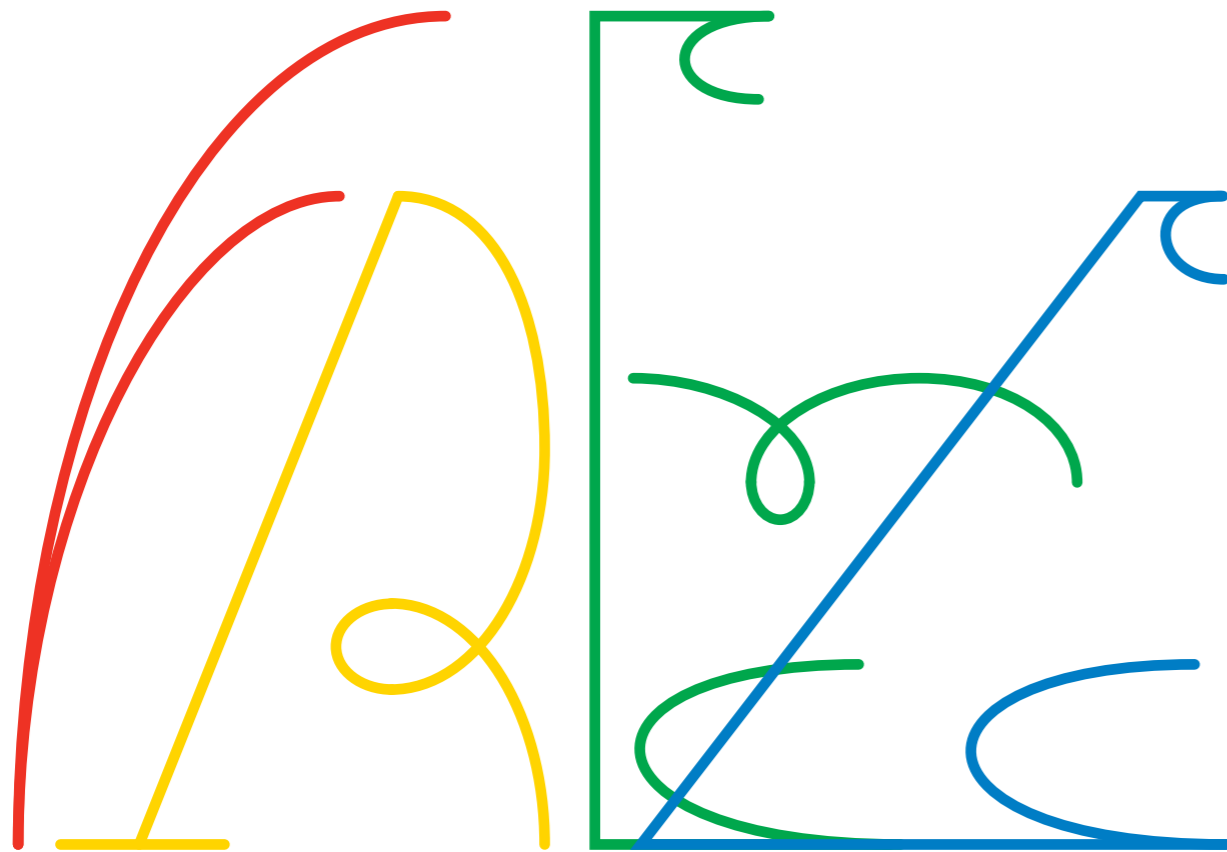
Alphe is scripted to allow for color assignment–across this spread color moves analogously across Google's colors
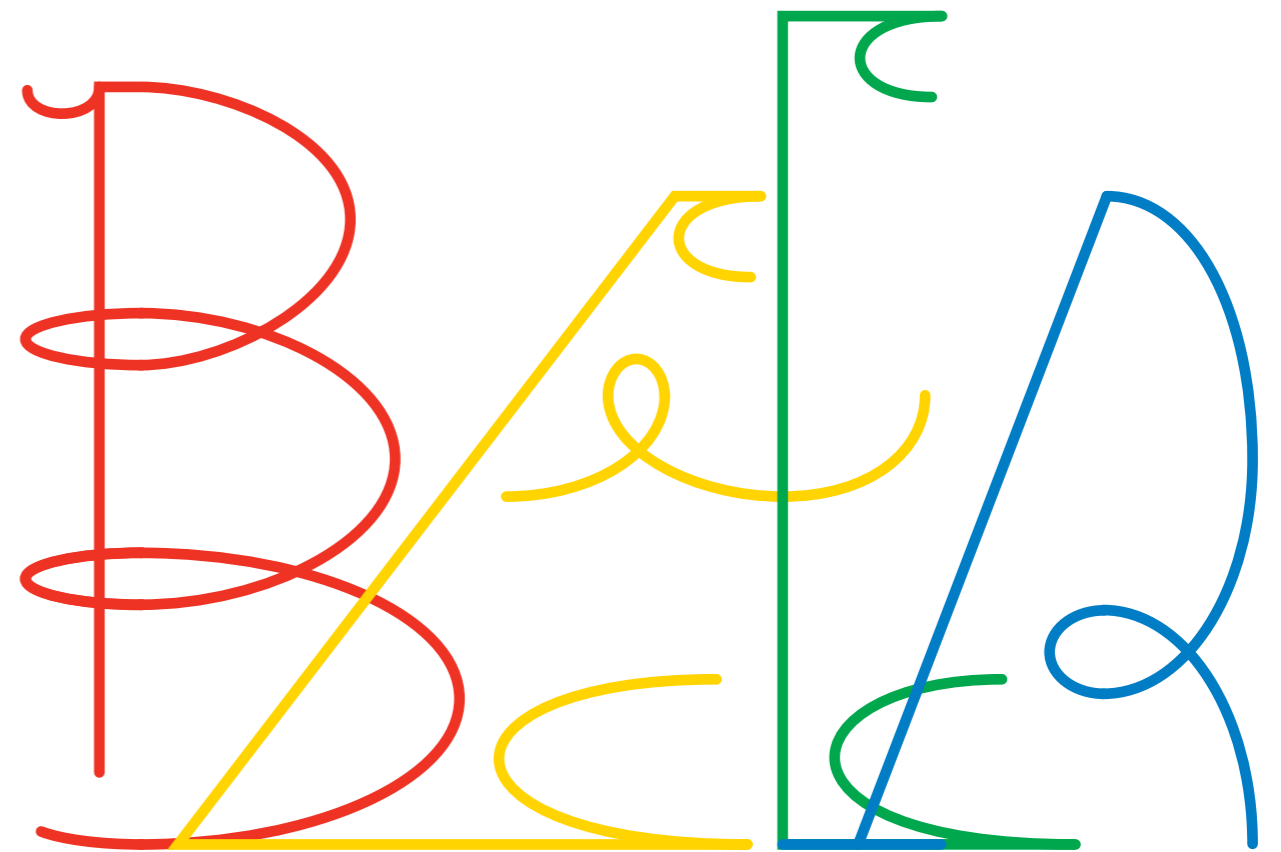
Alphe's alternate stylistic sets have additional stylistic alternates–adding to the uniqueness and rhythm

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

EXTRA ORDINARY

INFINITELY VERITABLE
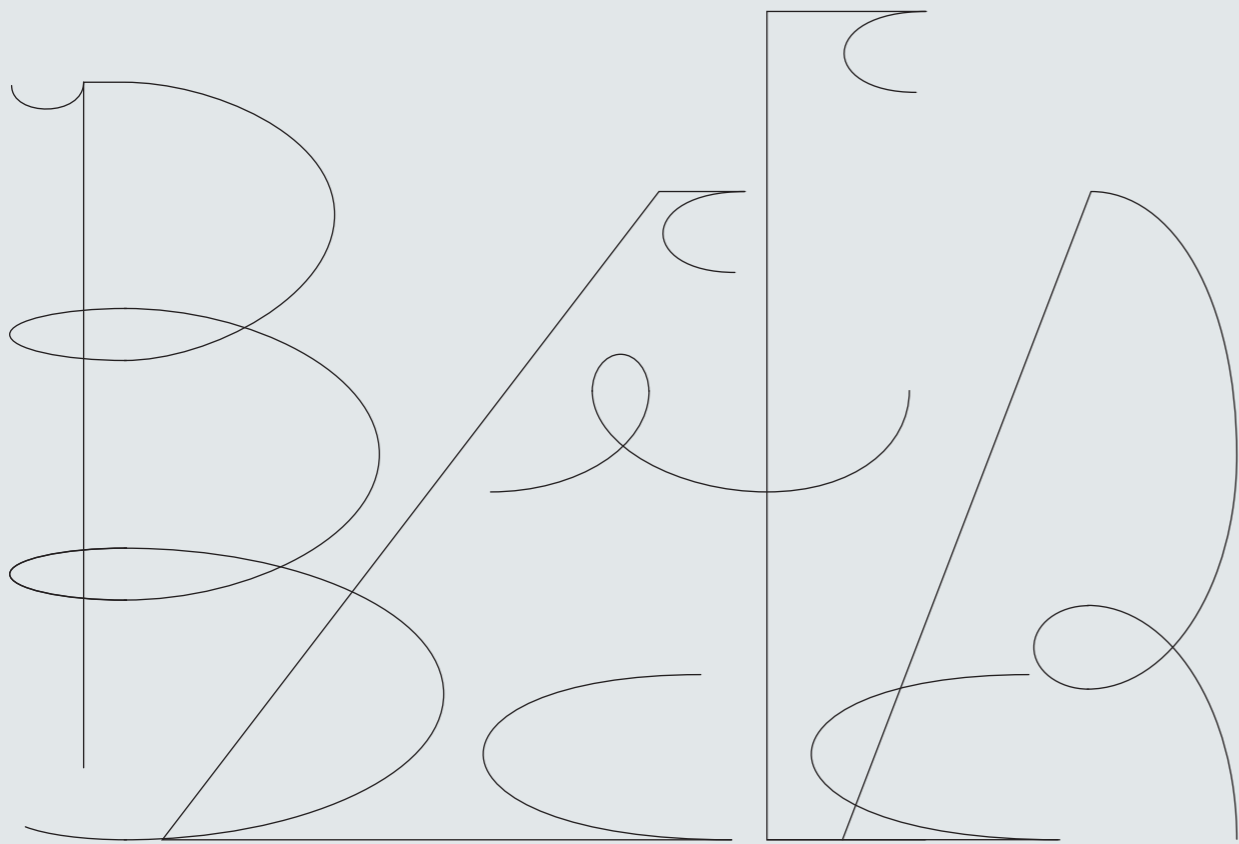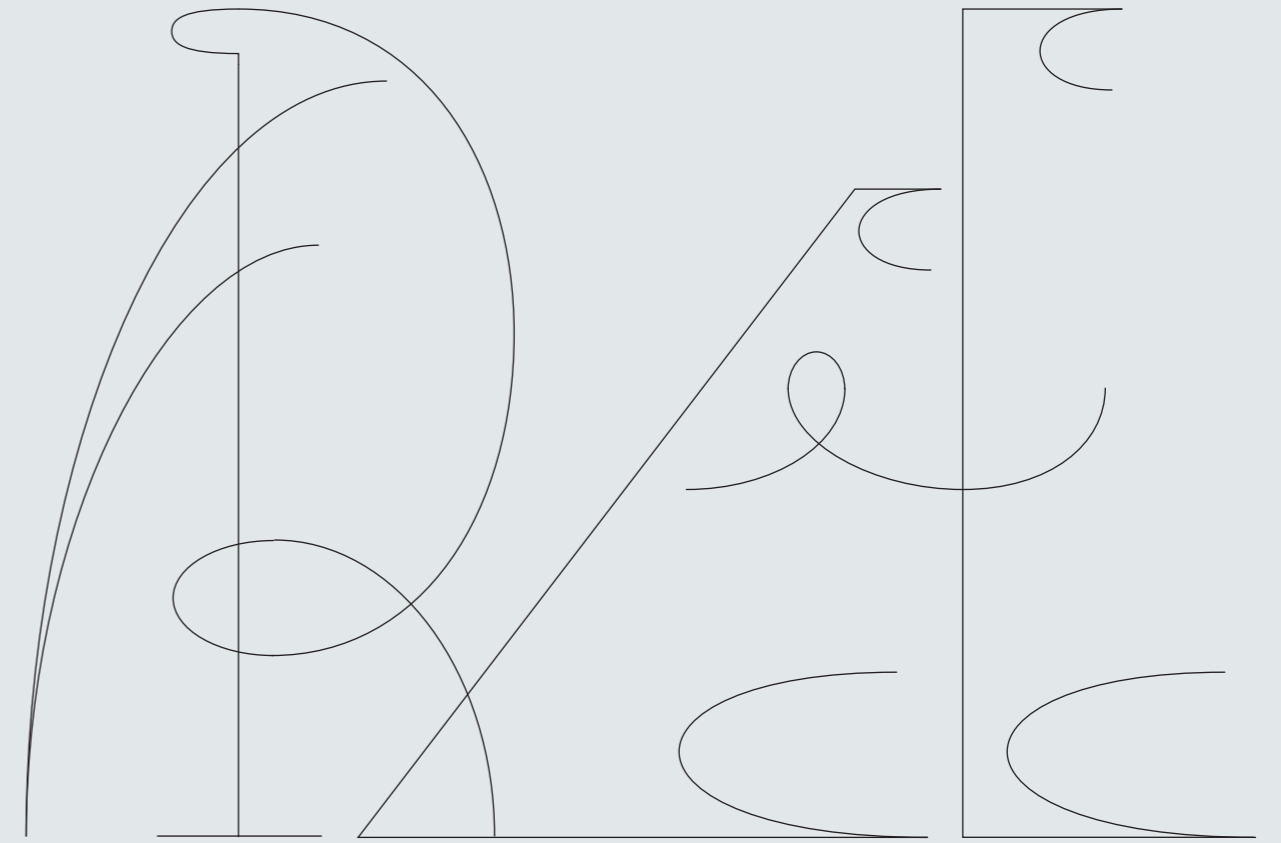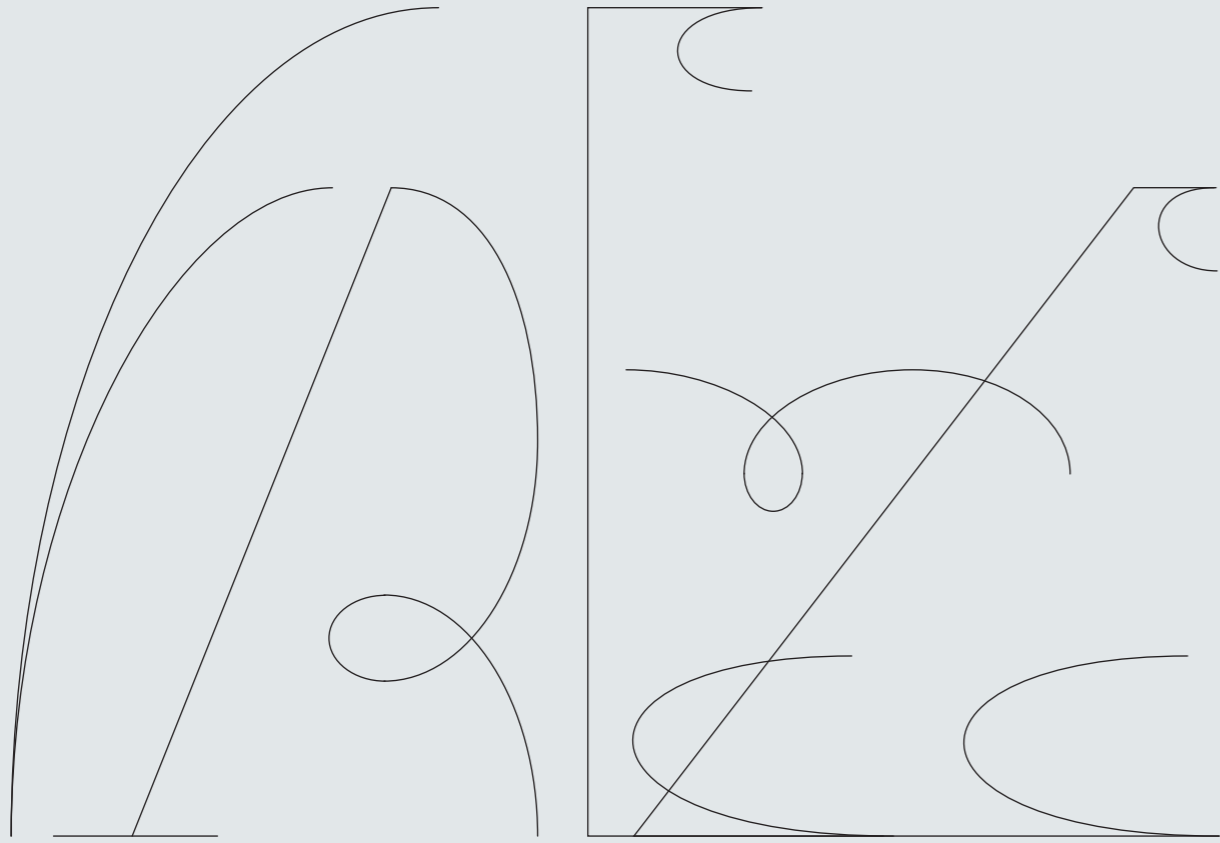
'free beer, free pizza' set in 400pt *Alphe* with hairline weighting and default uniform color
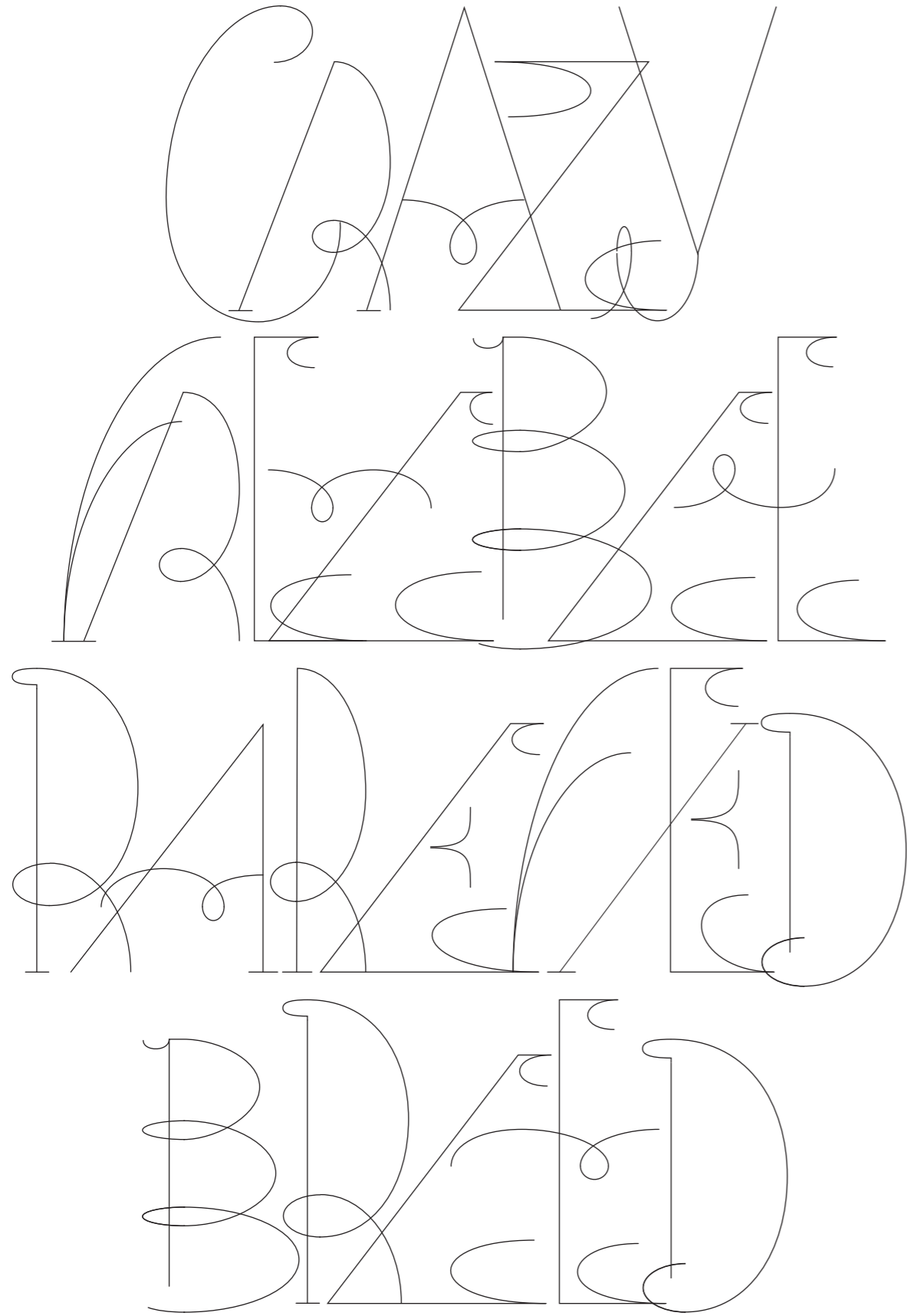
'Crazy Freebee, Rarefied Breed' set in 200pt / 160pt *Alphe* with hairline weighting and contextual alternates
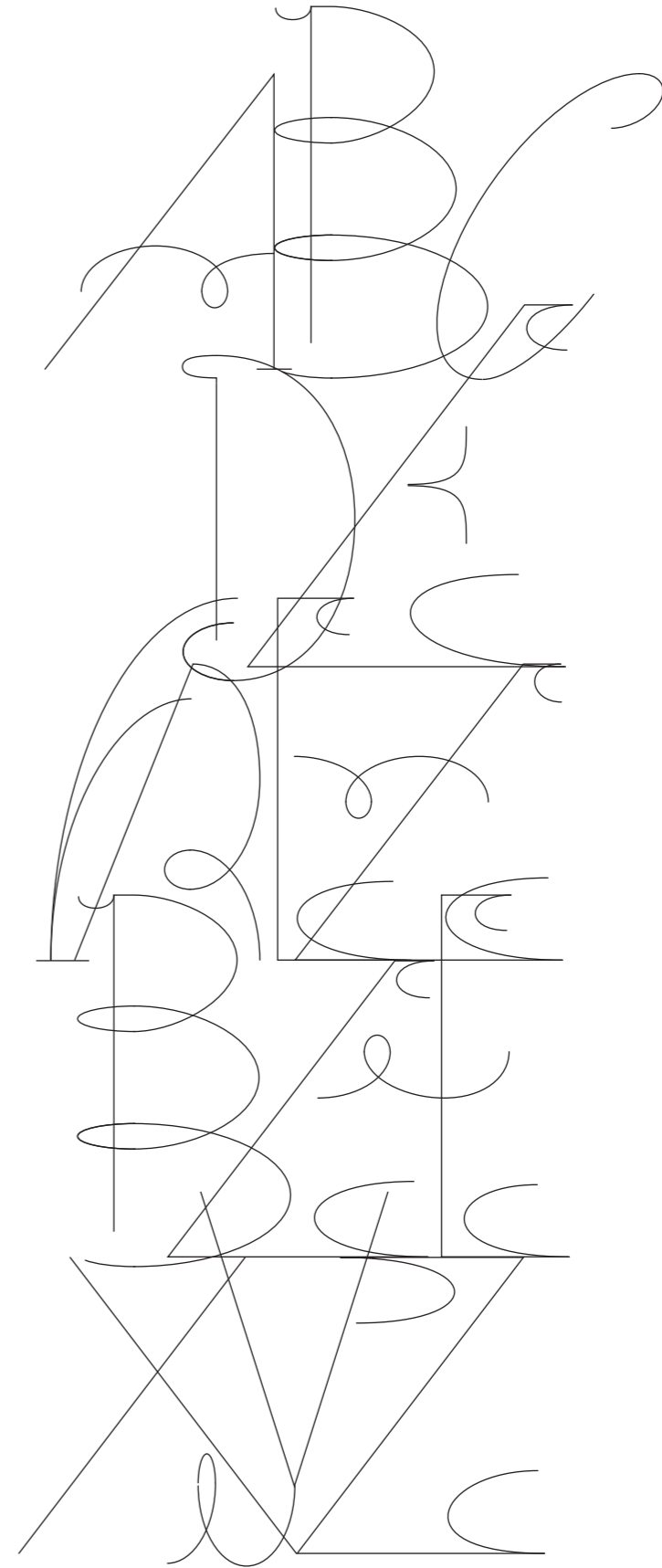
200pt / 120pt *Alphe* with hairline weighting and contextual alternates

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

EXTRA ORDINARY   INFINITELY VERITABLE
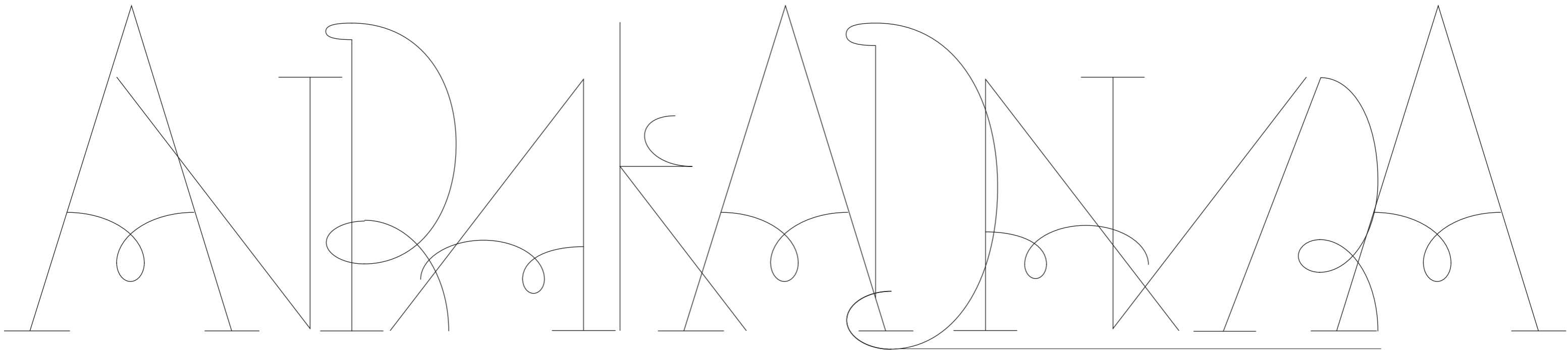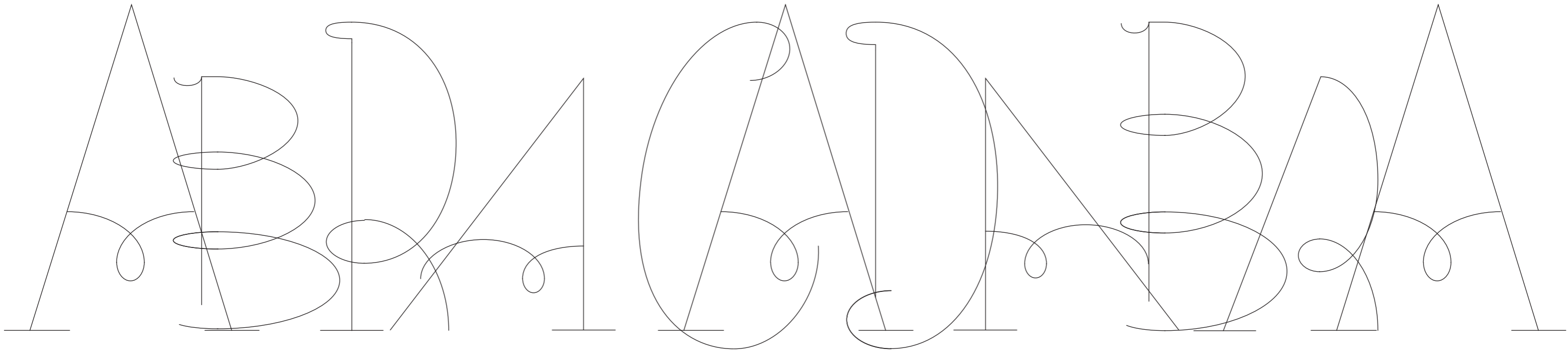
the magician's term 'abracadabra' is Aramaic in origin from the phrase 'avra kadavra' meaning, it will be created in my words
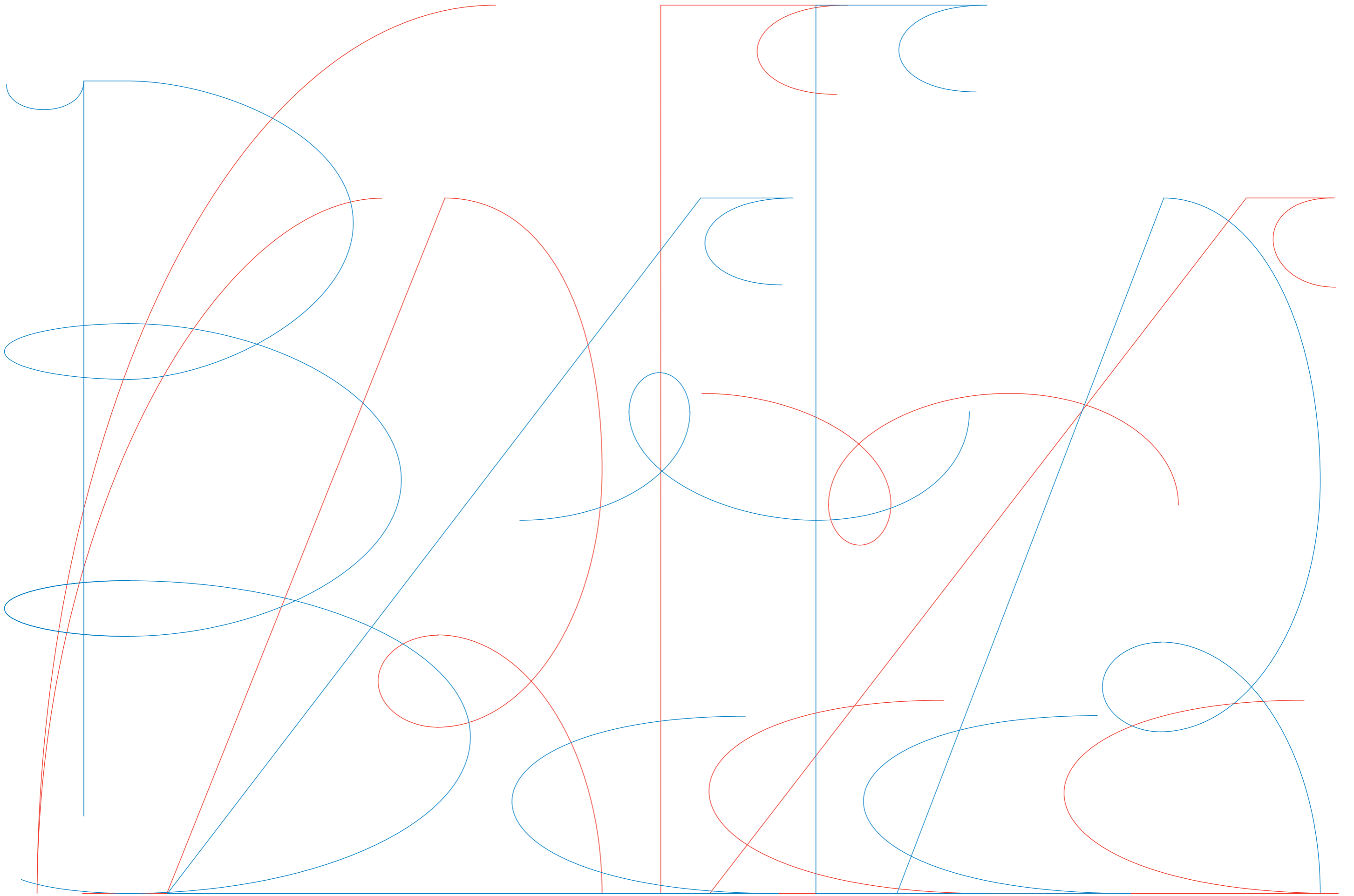
one final lock-up — set with zero leading, the effect is one like beer-googles

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK EXTRA ORDINARY INFINITELY VERITABLE

2018 Graduate Grad Show

Fellow designer and 2018 graduate student, Cara Buzzell and I were commissioned to collaborate on the conception and design of the 2018 Grad Show. The prompt was simple: design a system that scales. The opportunity was inspiring: design an identity that will be part of every 2018 Masters student's final days at RISD.

Often, I have heard the graduate experience described as time and space — but for what? Across the 16 departments and the 492 graduating students: rigor, and celebration seemed to us like being a uniting qualities that we could honor.

With our intentions set, we asked: 'how might our identity embody 2018ness?' An embrace of contradictions was our answer. We designed a system containing tension and release, lock-ups, drop-downs, and some pieces fall where they may. A *superliminal* tone, with subliminal rigor. This constant flicking of back and forth that reflects the way our world is currently communicating.

Shall it be *Grad Show* or *Graduate Show*? Both seemed the most fun and appropriate.

several of the 2018 *graduate show* identity elements

poster 36 × 50 —*grad* Rhode Island School of Design version

poster 36 × 50 —*graduate* RISD version

graduate degree

the identity uses one typeface: *UntitledSans*, Bold and Regular — was selected for its effort of neutrality, as related to Naoto Fukasawa's *Super Normal*

gr ad ua te

gr ad

for the lock-ups, I redrew *UnititledSans* to have equally weighted vertical strokes, allowing the large type to function in a more display-like way

gr ad

grad lock-up inteded for use with Rhode Island School of Design lock-up

gr ad ua te

The *graduate* lock-up intended for use with RISD lock-up

RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL OF DESIGN

Rhode Island School of Design lock-up for use with *grad* lock-up

RISD

RISD lock-up intended for use with *graduate* lock-up

sh0!w 2018

show2018 elements to be used, manipulated, and spaced in *fun ways* with either lock-up

MAY 23
MAY 24
MAY 25
MAY 26
MAY 27
MAY 28
MAY 29
MAY 30
MAY 31
JUNE 1
JUNE 2

gr ad ua te

graduate lock-up is 9× *countdown*

we lovingly refer to this element as the *countdown* — it is the dates of the show ... our finals days at RISD

the countdown is the foundational sizing-element of the system — elements have a size relationship with it

RISD

RISD lock-up is sized 3× the *countdown*

FUN
FUN
sh o !w 201 8
FUN FUN

THE 'O' HAS BEEN STRETCHED IN A FUN AMOUNT

The non-manipulated letterforms of *show2018* characters are 4.5× the size of *countdown* — the manipulated characters are fun, as appropriate

ceramics
digital + media
graphic design
interior architecture
industrial design
landscape architecture
printmaking
sculpture
textiles
teaching + learning in art + design
painting
furniture
glass
jewelry + metalsmithing
architecture
photography

RI CONVENTION CENTER   1 SABIN STREET PROVIDENCE RI

detail text is .4× of *countdown*

RHODE ISLAND
SCHOOL OF DESIGN

this lockup is 1.5× *countdown* with equal lead

the countdown always bleeds off the edge this allows the composition to feel bigger than it actually is

MAY 23
MAY 24
MAY 25
MAY 26
MAY 27
MAY 28
MAY 29
MAY 30
MAY 31
JUNE 1
JUNE 2

gr ad

departments are .8× *countdown*

the *grad* lock-up is 15× *countdown*

departments have a sense of gravity

EXTRA ORDINARY   2018 GRADUATE GRAD SHOW

RHODE ISLAND
SCHOOL OF DESIGN

MAY 23 | OPENING RECEPTION | 6–8 PM
MAY 24 | OPEN DAILY | 12–5 PM
MAY 25
MAY 26 | MASTERS OF:
MAY 27
MAY 28
MAY 29
MAY 30
MAY 31
JUNE 1
JUNE 2

gr
ad
sh0!w 2018

architecture
ceramics
digital + media
graphic design
interior architecture
landscape architecture
glass
industrial design
furniture
jewelry + metalsmithing
sculpture
painting
photography
printmaking
teaching + learning in art + design
textiles

the size and spacing relationships are as solid as the physical assets of the identity

gr RISD
ad
ua
te
sh0!w 2018

OPENING RECEPTION | 6–8 PM | MAY 23
OPEN DAILY | 12–5 PM | MAY 24
MAY 25
MAY 26
MAY 27
MAY 28
MAY 29
MAY 30
MAY 31
JUNE 1
JUNE 2

MASTERS OF:

teaching + learning in art + design
photography
printmaking
jewelry + metalsmithing
textiles
interior architecture
painting
sculpture
landscape architecture
industrial design
glass
furniture
graphic design
digital + media
ceramics
architecture

a kit of parts, many of which are infrastructural and arguably unseen but felt

A Metamodernist

Classically trained musician, political theory PHD, experimental pop star John Maus was headed to Providence to perform at the Columbus Theatre. All of Maus's videos and designed ephemeral come from his fans, so I sent an e-mail to his agent and this became my opportunity to design a system embracing the complexity of Maus.

The poster I designed responds to Maus's simultaneous expressions of Medieval *ecclesiastical-modes* (formulas of melodic, rhythmic, early Christian chanting) and what he calls 'today's vernacular,' contemporary Pop. Interested in this contrast of sound and history, I formally explored concepts of melody, harmony, sound projection, lightness and darkness.

Typographic inspiration came from Medieval heraldic devices, Gutenberg's blackletter, and high-contrast *Didone* typefaces often described as capable of portraying beauty. From the large, stylishly different display letters to the typeface made for secondary text, all forms where designed using divisible units. This allowed for a systematic composition that projected harmony.
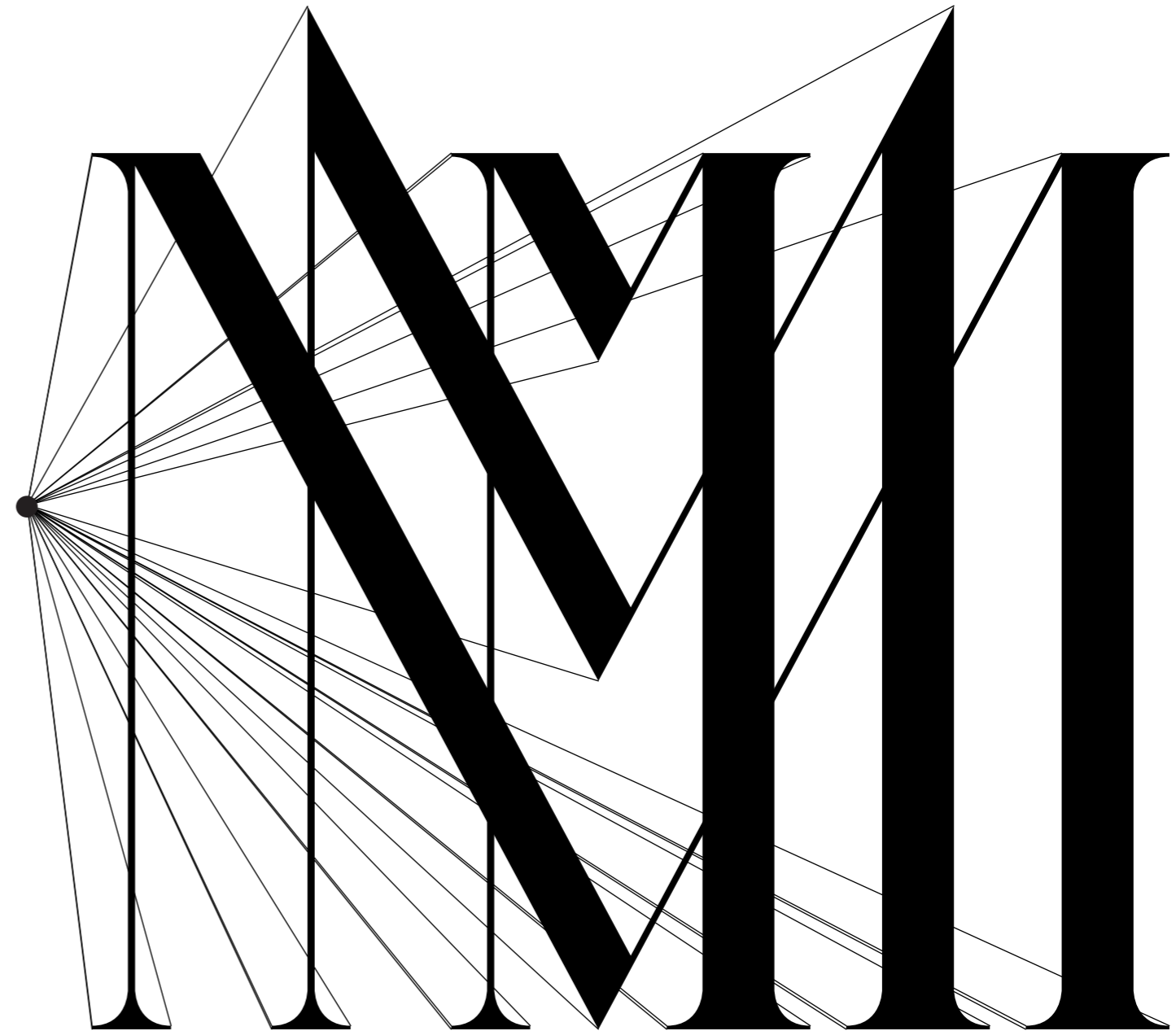
the letter 'M' designed in response to the harmonic polyphony of Maus's music
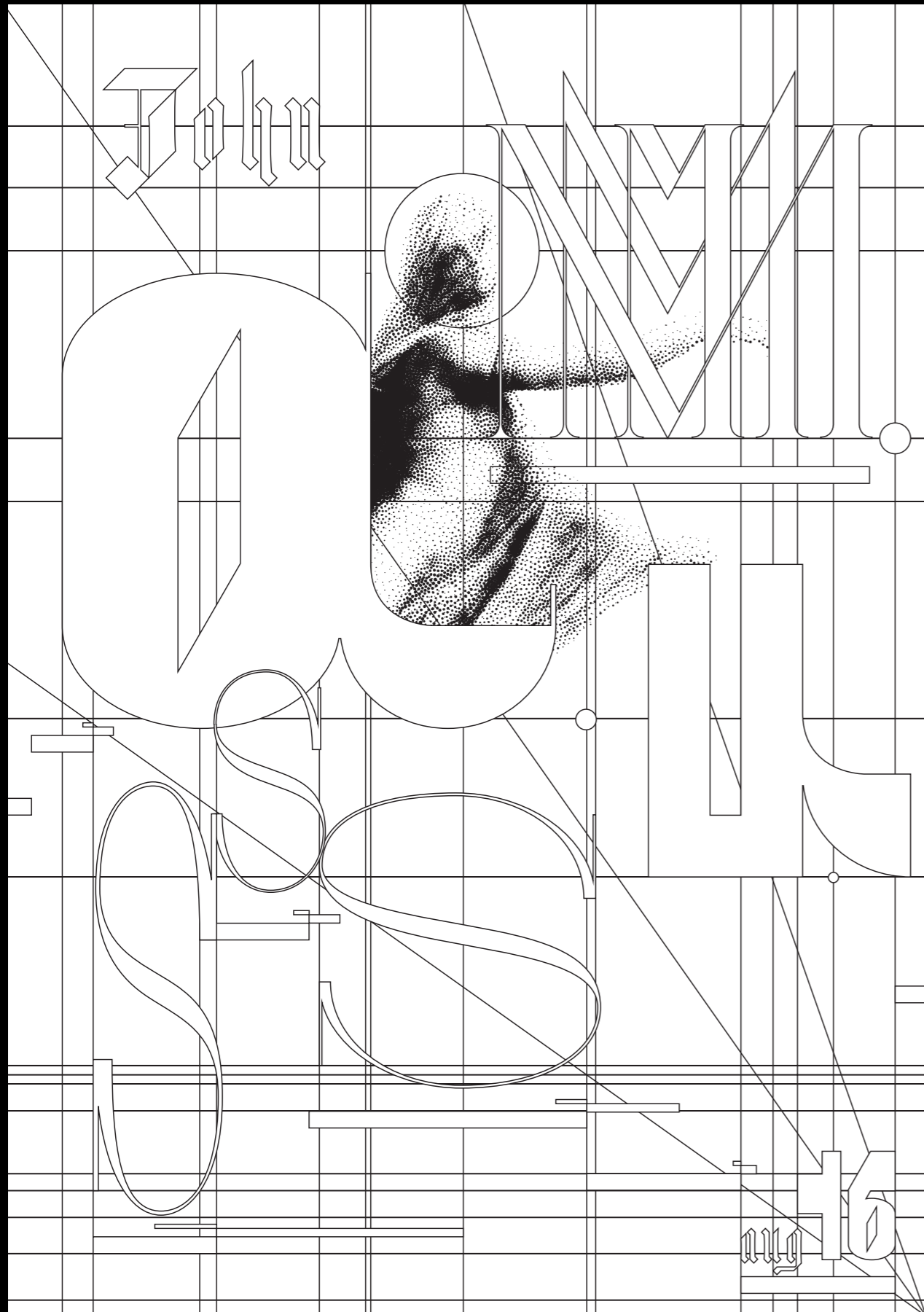
infrastructure demonstrating intentional harmony and contrast

poster for John Maus's Providence performance   90 × 128 cm weltformat

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK

EXTRA ORDINARY   A METAMODERNIST

John

OCT VIII.

columbus

theatre

aug 16

the weight and placement of each line, letter, and element have integral, mathematic relationships emphasizing a harmonic musicality

Maus's music unties contemporary-Pop with 17th century *church-modes* like the music of Bach

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwy

nodding to Maus's centuries of musical fusion an Albert Durer/Gutenberg-like blackletter alphabet was drawn in a contemporary manner

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwy

this version has the connecting strokes removed, offering greater contrast

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwy

the final version used a stencil structure bringing in greater counterspace increasing the light and dark contrast

John

one of the features of the final version is the subtle, glyphic-like swelling

abcdef
ghijkl
mnopqr
stuvwy

this modular mono-space setting of Fraktur unites the past with the present

exaggerated letter drama, sets in a manner of medieval typographic devices
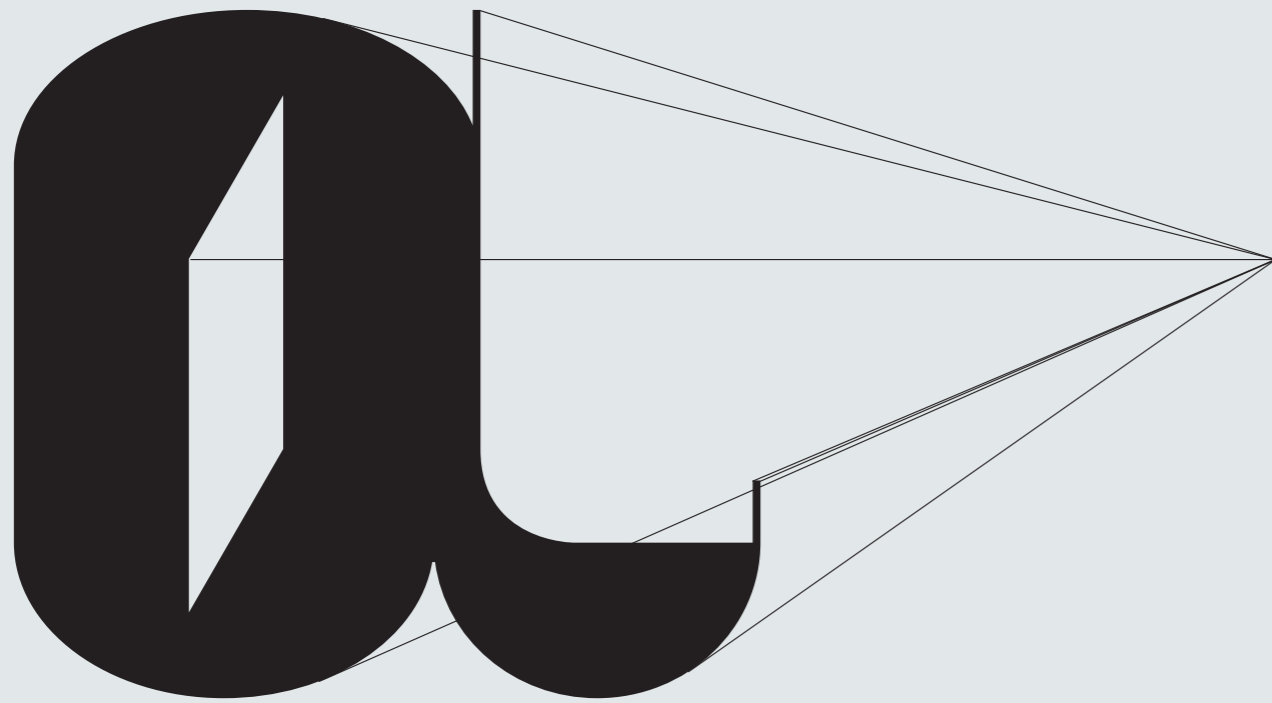
while mathematically related to the 'M' & 'S,' the 'A' & 'U' are *futuretro* interpretations of blackletter

where the 'M' feels harmonic, the 'S' is about vocal range

THIS IS PUBLIC WORK EXTRA ORDINARY A METAMODERNIST

"The Sleep of Sorrow and the Dream of Joy", *The Art Journal*, 1863 Virtue & Co.

a custom Processing.JS script was written to create a stippled-like vector edition of the engraving

countless variations were attempted

Here Lyeth
A Monumental Book

This *monumental book* is a study at 1:1 scale, diving into the meaning-filled and highly crafted tombstones of the 17–18th century. It focuses in on details related to the culture of the time, the symbols used, and the inventiveness of the inscribed lettering — structures, ligatures, characters that I've never seen anywhere else. The book proposes that tombstones were once a place where craft and expression were welcomed forms of tribute, perhaps even, celebration of the departed.

The book ends with sharp contrast featuring another 1:1 representation — today's online headstone-purchasing process that many people, and cemeteries, use today.

This project came about through two experiences. When I moved to Rhode Island, I found an in-law suite on a historic estate. An 18th-century family burial plot is in my sideyard. Each stone is exquisitely carved by John Stevens.

The second experience is sad. In the summer of 2017, I became an uncle. The same day our family lost this new niece. I help researched and arranged the cemetery options. The tombstone process was less than monumental: it was default. Her name was Ava.

4' × 6' page spreads

headstone in my side yard of Deputy Governor John Greene Esquire, carved by John Stevens

WHAT ARE WE LEAVING BEHIND?

HERE LYES ŷ BODY
OF BENJAMIN PICKMAN
AGED 63 YEARS &
5 Mᵒ DEPEARED HIS
LIFE DECEMBER ŷ 31ˢᵗ
1 7 0 8.
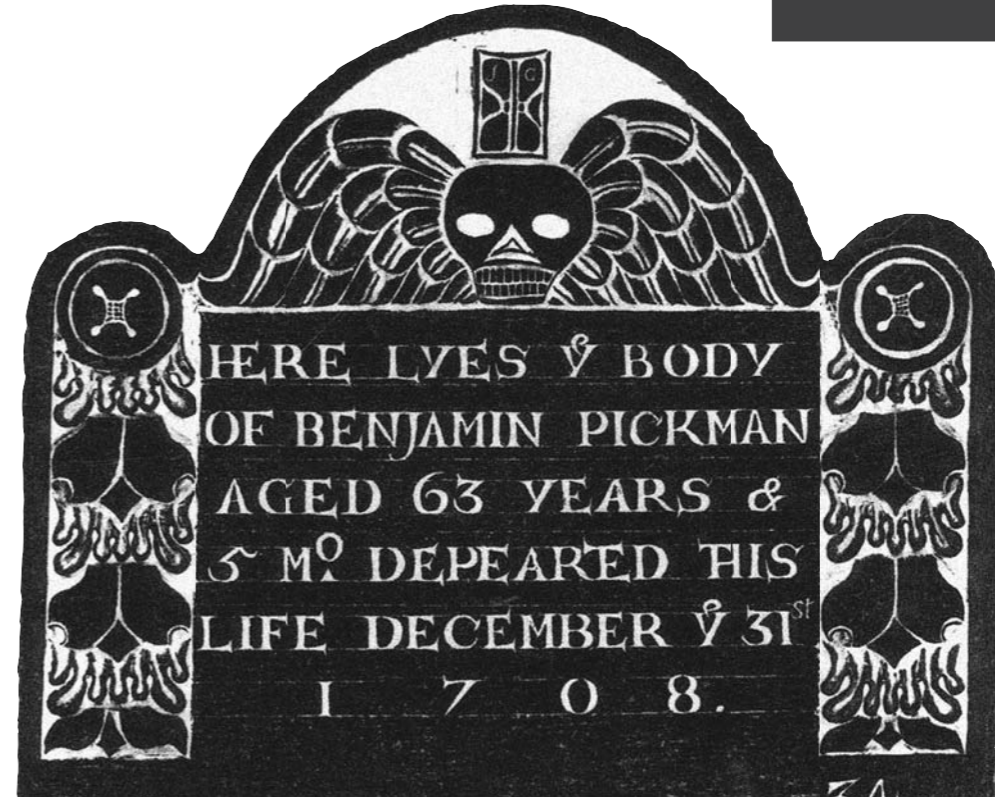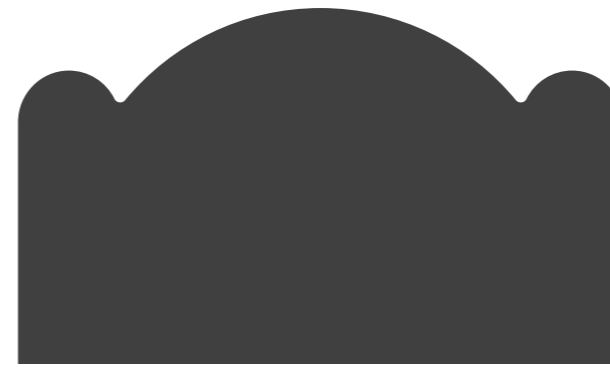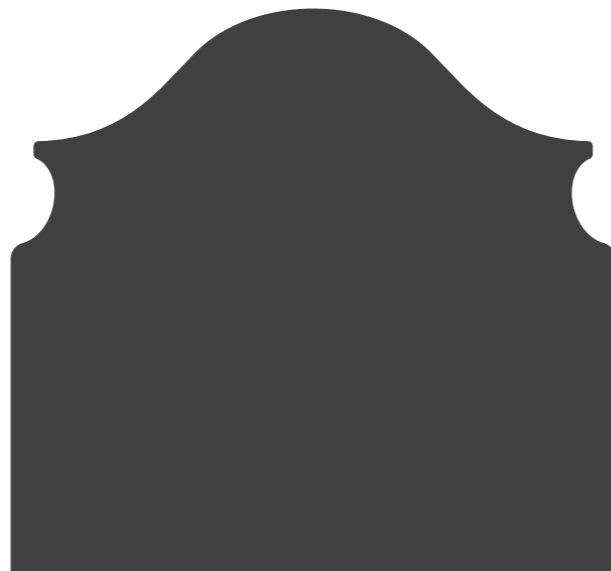
the opening spread features silhouettes and a rubbing of New England headstone styles of the 17-18th century

New England stone-carvers of this period shaped all headstones to be like an archway

Here lyeth

A STUDY OF MONUMENTS

SEPARATED BY 300 YEARS OF CRAFT,
KNOWLEDGE, & INNOVATION

Lyeth

Lieth

Here Lyeth

Here Lieth

Here Lyeth ye Body of

Here Lieth ye Body of

Here Lies ye Body of

Here Lise ye Body of

Here Lyes ye Body of

Lies

Lise

Lyes

The first line
of a typical inscription
on 17 – 18 th century
American gravestones,
of New England,
begin similarly.

The inscribed variations
of spelling LYETH OF LIETH
are representative
of a style shift, in which
spelling had change.
However, LIES and LISE
are indications of relaxed
spelling, a cultural practice
that generously favored
phonetic spelling. This was
to aid the majority of society
that were uneducated.

The first dictionary
published in America
was *Perry's* of 1788.

3

the lettering style is designed as a fusion across *Genath* (François Rappo's baroque interpretation) and the inscriptional qualities of the stones

stone-carvers chose to spell phonetically, as the much of the public was under-educated   the majority of these tombstones predate the dictionary

292   THIS IS PUBLIC WORK   EXTRA ORDINARY   HERE LYETH A MONUMENTAL BOOK

5

the table of contents allows you to search by year and size of the image in the book

HERE LYETH
BURIED Y BODY
OF ELIZABETH
RAYNSFORD AGED
81. YEARES
DECEASED Y 16
DAY OF NOUEMBER
IN Y YEAR 1688

What might the markings
we see here say about
the cultures of our past?

All artifacts (architecture,
tools, objects, art, design,
etc) reflect the morals
and ethics of the culture
they came from. An artifact's
material, formal, and
symbolic, qualities provide
insights that allow us to
better understand the past
and the present.

What might the markings
we make today say about
ourselves and our world?

STONE CARVER   William Mumford
LOCATION   Boston Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED   Elizabeth Raynsford   1688

7

the pages were printed on thin paper to create a ghosting effect

the single-image pages show the stones at actual size

each image is paired with details of the carver and the departed

In New England, gravestones of the 17–18th century are easily identifiable by the size, shape, style, and symbols used.

The variation and amount of expression on these stones are unlike the conservative conventions of today.

STONE CARVER   John Stevens   the 1st
LOCATION   Newport   Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED   James Nickols   1710

While sternly religious, the early American, Puritan and Baptist cultures of the 17–18th century preferred their graves to be marked with symbols of life and death, rather than ones tied to a religion.

American antiquity scholars have termed these symbols to be *motifs of mortality*.

As religious persecution brought people from Europe to America, the choice to not use traditional, religious symbols is believed to have been a genuine connected to religious acceptance.

STONE CARVER   Joseph Lamson
LOCATION   Wakefield   Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED   Thomas Bancroft   1691

9

the images were selected from the American Antiquarian Society's *Farber Gravestone Collection*

as the largest dimension of the images was 1024 pixels a processing method was created to scale them to 3 feet wide (10,800 pixels)

298   THIS IS PUBLIC WORK   EXTRA ORDINARY   HERE LYETH A MONUMENTAL BOOK

As religious persecution brought people from Europe to America, the choice to not use traditional, religious symbols is believed to have been a gesture connected to religious acceptance.

STONE CARVER   Joseph Lamson

LOCATION   Wakefield   Massachusetts

THE DEPARTED   Thomas Bancroft   1691

9

right-hand page of the book at full size.

the book's copy provides context for the details of the graves

The skulls with wings are known as *Death's Head*.

The *Death's Head* image symbolizes the flight of the soul, as a reminder to the onlooker of their own mortality.

These *motifs of mortality* demonstrate the cultural acceptance of death.

Death's Head was carved in many styles, each, based upon the taste and ability of the individual carver.

clockwise from top left

STONE CARVER   Big O Bulb & Square Skull Carver
PERHAPS   Phillip Stevens
LOCATION   Newport   Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED   Jireh Bull   1691

STONE CARVER   Big O Bulb & Square Skull Carver
PERHAPS   Phillip Stevens
LOCATION   Newport   Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED   Sarah Sanford   1722

STONE CARVER   Nathaniel & Caleb Lamson
LOCATION   Southold   New York
THE DEPARTED   Samuel Hutchinson   1737

STONE CARVER   Thomas Johnson I
LOCATION   New Haven   Connecticut
THE DEPARTED   Nathaniel Yale   1730

The Julian and Gregorian calendars were commonly used in colonial America. Their major difference was the on the start of a year, March 25 vs January 1.

It wasn't until 1752 that the Colonies & Great Britain fully adopted the use of the Gregorian calendar.

The fraction-like inscription of 1724/5 acknowledges a cultural difference of how an onlooker given year.

This typographic maneuver demonstrates; either/or.

The full-justification achieved on the above inscription was realized through meticulous word & letter spacing.

The *Death's Head* that seem to be smiling, intentionally do so. This styling emphasizes death's victory over life.

Death smiles upon us.

clockwise from top left

STONE CARVER   Big O Bulb & Square Skull Carver
PERHAPS   Phillip Stevens
THE DEPARTED   Sarah Sanford   1724/5

STONE CARVER   Unknown Carver
LOCATION   Tisbury   Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED   Samuel Merrey   1737

STONE CARVER   Henry Christian Geyer
LOCATION   West Barnstable   Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED   Samuel Merrey   1769

STONE CARVER   Joseph & John Lamson
LOCATION   Cambridge   Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED   Samuel Merrey   1769

II

spread showing eight versions of what stone-carvers called the *Death's Head*

many of the skulls appear to be smiling

1722 Aged 6 Mon_{ths}.
& 16 days

The Julian and Gregorian
calendars were commonly
used in colonial America.
Their major difference was
the on the start of a year,
March 2 5 vs January 1.

It wasn't until 1 7 5 2 that
the Colonies & Great Britain
fully adopted the use of the
Gregorian calendar.

The fraction-like inscription
of 1 7 2 4 / 5 acknowledges
a cultural difference of how
an onlooker given year.

This typographic maneuver
demonstrates; either/or.

Here Lyeth the Body
of Mr Nathaniel
Yale Who Deceased
October ye 2 9th 1730.
Aged 78 Years

Here lies Buried the Body
of M^r. Benjamin Marston
who died March 26. 1769.
in the 76th Year of his Age.

These *motifs of mortality*
demonstrate the cultural
acceptance of death.

Death's Head was carved
in many styles, each, based
upon the taste and ability
of the individual carver.

The *Death's Heads* that seem
to be smiling, intentionally
do so. This styling emphasizes
death's victory over life.

Death smiles upon us.

STONE CARVER   Big O Bulb & Square Skull Carver
PERHAPS   Phillip Stevens
rt   Rhode Island
irch Bull   1 6 9 1

STONE CARVER   Big O Bulb & Square Skull Carver
PERHAPS   Phillip Stevens
LOCATION   Newport   Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED   Sarah Sanford   1 7 2 2

STONE CARVER   Nathaniel & Caleb Lamson
LOCATION   Southold   New York
THE DEPARTED   Samuel Hutchinson   1 7 3 7

STONE CARVER   Thomas Johnson I
LOCATION   New Haven   Connecticut
THE DEPARTED   Nathaniel Yale   1 7 3 0

STONE CARVER   Big O Bulb & Square Skull Carver
PERHAPS   Phillip Stevens
LOCATION   Stonington   Connecticut
THE DEPARTED   Sarah Sanford   1 7 2 4 / 5

STONE CARVER   Unknown Carver
LOCATION   Tisbury   Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED   Samuel Merrey   1 7 2 7

STONE CARVER   Henry Christian G
LOCATION   West Barnstable   Massa
THE DEPARTED   Samuel Merrey

clockwise from top left

shown above is the *Death's Head* spread shown at 50% scale

The swinging scythe symbolizes Death's harvest and expresses the speed in which death takes.

A falling hourglass demonstrates one's time coming to a stop.

The Medieval Latin phrase *Memento Mori,* is often found on the 17th & 18th century headstones. It translates to, 'remember that you have to die'.

There is perhaps no better reminder of mortality than the image of Death itself holding an hourglass.

from top to bottom

STONE CARVER Believed to be Multiple Carvers
LOCATION Old Lyme Connecticut
THE DEPARTED Polley Higgins 1797

STONE CARVER John Stevens the 1st
LOCATION Newport Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED Martin Howard 1776

STONE CARVER John Bull
LOCATION Newport Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED Elizabeth Coggeshall 1773

from top to bottom

STONE CARVER Henry Christian Geyer
LOCATION Quincy Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED William Glover 1779

STONE CARVER Nathaniel Phelps
LOCATION South Hadley Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED William Montague 1767

STONE CARVER Unidentified
LOCATION Boston Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED Henry Roby 1867

15

the tympanum features a motif of mortality, said to have been done to remind the viewer that they too have to die

Colonial Puritans believed
that the soul passes through
death to enter eternity. The
shapes of the stones suggest
archways to a portal.

The shoulders or finials
of the archways were a space
for secondary imagery.

STONE CARVER   Joseph Lamson
LOCATION   Malden   Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED   Ensign Thomas Lynd   1693
& Elizabeth Lynd   1693
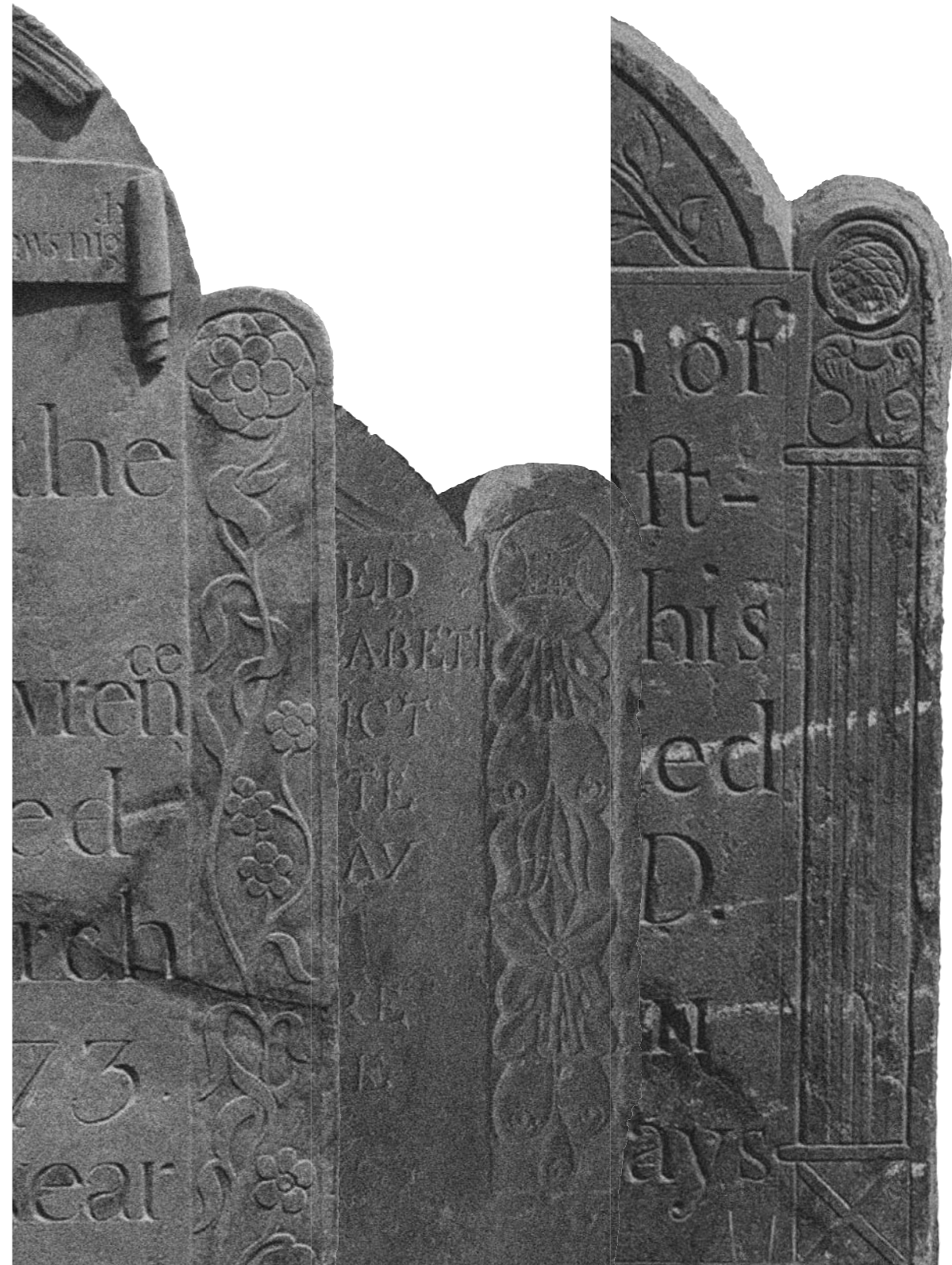
Vines, fruit, & flowers
are the dominate elements
of the archways.

Breast and squash often
appear together symbolizing
nourishment of the soul.

Neoclassic columns come
into fashion in the early
19th century gravestones.

from left to right

STONE CARVER   William, John, & Thomas Park
LOCATION   Lexington   Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED   Jonathan Lawrence   1773

STONE CARVER   Believed to be Multiple Carvers
LOCATION   Roxbury   Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED   Elizabeth White   1699/700

STONE CARVER   Gabriel Allen
LOCATION   Providence   Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED   Samuel Westcot   1765

19

the shoulders of the headstone were often light-hearted, depicting gifts for the departed

Abbreviations of titles often superscripted several of the characters.

Abbreviations occurred with any word, no rules. However, often several letters would be superscripted to help the onlooker read.

Superscripted letters with carets were used to correct accidental omissions.

Conventions of typography and lettering today, has retained abbreviations with superscripts only for numerals: 1st, 2nd, 3rd etc.

The easiest way to identify a contemporary typeface is by the lower-case z, the lowercase g seems of the gravestones seems to be a way to identify different carvers.

The spelling Ye (as in the) uses the symbol that closely resembles the letter y, but stands for the th sound.

This symbol, a thorn, is seen most often as ye but was also used as yt for that.

The word yta developed out of using the thorn to write the word this.

STONE CARVER Ebenezer Drake
LOCATION Windsor
THE DEPARTED Kezia Elsworth 1762

STONE CARVER Nathaniel & Caleb Lamson
LOCATION Southold New York
THE DEPARTED Samuel Hutchinson 1737/8

STONE CARVER Thomas Gold
LOCATION Stratford Connecticut
THE DEPARTED Edward Hawley 1782

STONE CARVER Ebenezer Howard
LOCATION Needham Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED Elizabeth Daniell 1761

STONE CARVER John Stevens the 1st
LOCATION Newport Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED Hugh Ellis 1713

STONE CARVER Big O Bulb & Square Skull Carver
PERHAPS Phillip Stevens
LOCATION Stonington Connecticut
THE DEPARTED Lt. William Denison 1734/5

STONE CARVER Horton Carver
LOCATION Nova Scotia Canada
THE DEPARTED Elizabeth Dewolf 1784

STONE CARVER Ebenezer Howard
LOCATION Needham Massachusetts
THE DEPARTED Elizabeth Daniell 1761

from left to right, top to bottom

STONE CARVER Big O Bulb & Square Skull Carver
PERHAPS Phillip Stevens
LOCATION Newport Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED Jonathan Weeden 1721

STONE CARVER Gershom Bartlett
LOCATION Glastonbury Connecticut
THE DEPARTED Martha Welles 1763

STONE CARVER Bigham Family Shop
LOCATION Fairfield Pennsylvania
THE DEPARTED Jane Waugh 1770

STONE CARVER Ebenezer Drake
LOCATION Windsor Connecticut
THE DEPARTED Kezia Elsworth 1762

STONE CARVER Big O Bulb & Square Skull Carver
PERHAPS Phillip Stevens
LOCATION Stonington Connecticut
THE DEPARTED Joseph Denison 1734/5

STONE CARVER Bigham Family Shop
LOCATION Quartyville Pennsylvania
THE DEPARTED John Miffin 1739

STONE CARVER Ebenezer Drake
LOCATION Bloomfield New York
THE DEPARTED Samuel Hutchinson 1737

STONE CARVER John Stevens the 1st
LOCATION Newport Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED Joseph Whipple 1713

from left to right, top to bottom

25

tombstone typography today is conservative at best, whereas in the 18th century it was a expressive and innovative

Left monitor:
Show/Hide Borders · Show/Hide Background · Change Font · Save Design · Email · Print · Add to Cart

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FREE Shipping $199.00 Add to Cart

Right monitor:
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NICK
ADAM
03 07 1981
03 08 2081
"C'MON IN, BOYS ... THE WATER IS FINE!"

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Grey Granite Grass Level 16"Long x 8"Wide x 3"thick
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After 300 years of craft,
knowledge, & innovation
the carving process
has been democratized.

Not into Jesus? Don't worry,
there are some pine cones
or that nice bass sign that you
drive pass on 1-95.

The symbols offered here
speak to the de-skilling of
humanity and the adjacency
of default options.

STONE CARVER LegacyHeadstones.com
LOCATION Warwick Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED For Proof Only 2081
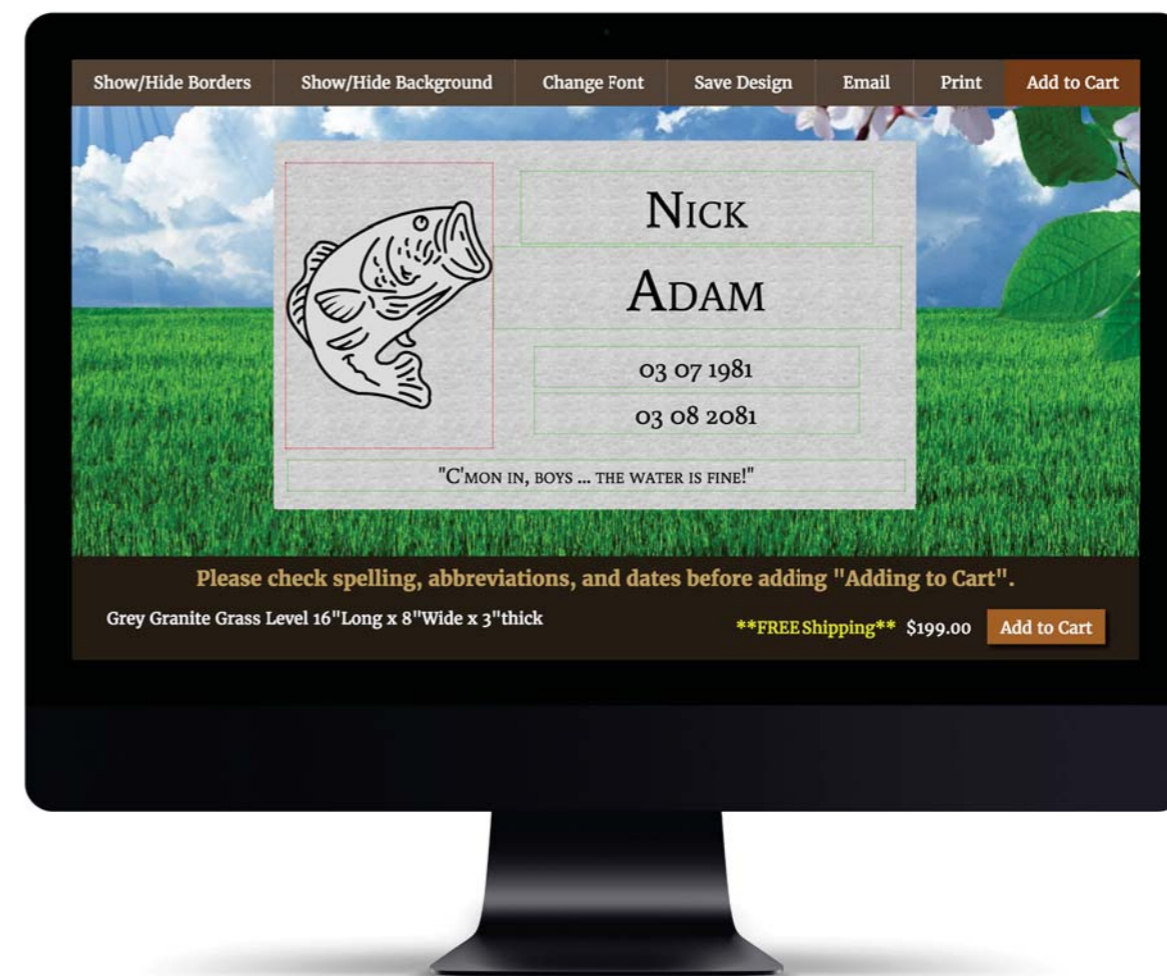
What might the markings
we make today say about
ourselves and our world?

STONE CARVER LegacyHeadstones.com
LOCATION Warwick Rhode Island
THE DEPARTED For Proof Only 2081

27

this is a real website: LegacyHeadstones.com, for designing and purchasing your departed's headstone

what will these fields of default monuments say about us in the future?   what will they say about you?

316   THIS IS PUBLIC WORK   EXTRA ORDINARY   HERE LYETH A MONUMENTAL BOOK

This is
not

over.

Words That Have Stayed with Me

If   I   have seen further
                   it is by   standing on
ye   shoulders of   Giants.
                   —Issac Newton   1676

The   present   contains
                   nothing   more than
the   past   and   what is found
   in
the   effect   was already
   in
the   cause.   —Henri Bergson   1907

There is   no longer   an outside
to the   world of design.
                   Design   has become
the world.   —Beatriz Colomina   2016

We   create
        the   means,
                   tools,
                   languages,
        and   schemas   in which
        the   designs exact,
        and they,   in turn,
design us.   —Leyla Acaroglu   2016

There is   only   one recipe
        to   care a great deal
        for   the cookery.
                   —Henry James   1896

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Acceptance of My Committee

A thesis by Nick Adam presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design in the Department of Graphic Design at the Rhode Island School of Design in Providence, 2018.

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Tertiary Advisor

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Graduate Program Director

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NICK ADAM WAS A 2-YEAR MFA STUDENT FROM CHICAGO